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Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

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Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada

Thesis Format: Monograph

By

Farzaneh Khosrojerdi

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirement for the degree of

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The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

The University of Western Ontario

London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

Through conducting qualitative case studies on 10 Muslim female students in Canadian universities and drawing on theories of third-wave feminism, post-colonial feminism, and anti-racist feminism, this research explores the experiences of Canadian Muslim female university students. It explores how gender, race, ethnicity, and religion, and their intersection, impact Muslim female students' identity construction and their overall experiences of higher education in Canada. This research investigates Muslim female students' perceptions of, and reactions towards, the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities. It also explores how Muslim female university students perceive the hijab and wearing it in Canadian universities. The findings of this research indicate the significance of the hijab in the lives of Diasporic Muslim women, and the different meanings that those women identify for the hijab. The findings highlight race, racism, and Othering as prominent issues in Canadian universities. They further reveal the prevalence of a number of negative stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities. These stereotypes homogenize Muslim women and (mis)represent them as oppressed by Islamic patriarchy. The study findings show the heterogeneity of Muslim women's lives and identities, and emphasize the need for a nuanced analysis of the cultural, political, historical, and geographical contexts in which the practice of veiling is exercised. In addition, Muslim women are identified by the research as active agents who challenge the stereotypes through reifying the best representation of Muslim women and by educating non-Muslims about Islam and Islamic beliefs. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the challenges associated with negotiating multiple identities amongst Muslim women and the supportive role that Muslim students associations play for Muslim women in maintaining their Islamic identities. The results of this research can have significant implications for policy makers at the higher education level. By informing university authorities and policy makers about the challenges that Muslim women face in Canadian universities, there is potential for improvements in the future.

Keywords: Muslim female students; Muslim identity; the hijab; veiling; higher education.

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To Amir,

Who taught me how to believe in my dreams,

And

To my beautiful angels, Arman, Ava, and Emma,

Who taught me how to love unconditionally.

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Chapter 1

1. Introducing the Study

This chapter introduces my research conducted with Muslim female students and their experiences of higher education in Canada. To this end, first I identify the main problem and discuss the gaps in the existing literature that motivated me to conduct research in this area. Next, I will state the research questions consisting of one overall question and three specific sub-questions. Finally, I will introduce the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which have informed this research, and guided me in every step of the study.

As Neider (2009) has argued,

‘...few call into question the Othering of Muslims across the globe or in local communities. This taken for granted normalization of Othering Muslims in society best occurs through one of the socializing systems/mechanisms in western society; education’ (p. 8).

Therefore, this research was an attempt to study this phenomenon at the level of higher education in Canada. The main objective of this research was to explore the overall experiences of Muslim female students within Canadian universities. I was particularly concerned with the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion and its impact on the process of identity construction of Muslim female students. My research attempted to highlight the problems associated with the prevailing tendency in western societies to erase the cultural, political, and historical specificity of Muslim women’s lives in the Third World. I examined Muslim female students’ perceptions of the prevailing stereotypes about them in Canadian universities, as well as their reactions toward those stereotypes. I was curious to find out whether or not Muslim female students accept or resist the normalized taken-for-granted accounts of their lives and identities, which portray a homogenous picture of them as oppressed by Islamic patriarchy. I explored Muslim female

students' opinions about the veil¹ and wearing the hijab in Canadian universities. My research also attempted to highlight the need for analyzing the practice of veiling in light of the context specific factors such as those related to the cultural and political contexts associated with the participants' countries of birth. In addition, I sought Muslim women's opinions about the veil as a signifier of Muslim women's oppression in Canadian higher educational system. Through a careful analysis of Muslim female students' perceptions of the hijab and using the theories of third-wave feminism, anti-racist feminism, and post-colonial feminism and the existing literature in this area, I endeavored to give voice to Muslim female students.

1.1 Research Problem

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the continued demonization of Islam, in general, and the persistent colonial and Orientalist conceptions of Muslim women, in particular, have placed Muslims, particularly Muslim women in the Diaspora in a very difficult position. The colonial and Orientalist conceptions of Muslim women paint a distorted image of their lives and identities, and, as Rezai-Rashti (1994, 1999) has argued, portray Muslim women as being oppressed by Islamic patriarchy, veiled, secluded, subjugated, and in need of rescue. According to Ahmad (2003), Muslim women, especially those easily identified by their appearance, that is, 'visible hijab-wearing women', and/or those who belong to visible minority Muslim groups, 'were amongst the most vulnerable victims of indiscriminate physical and verbal assaults' (p. 47). Thus, Muslims had to actively deal with the negative consequences of growing anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia. Muslim women, 'the principal target of discrimination,' (Hamdani, 2005, p. 20) have been at the forefront of this battle.

¹ Although there is a slight difference in meaning between the terms hijab and veil, in this study, these two terms are used synonymously and interchangeably, both referring to a piece of cloth used by many Muslim women for covering their hair. Muslim women cover their hair in different ways. For example, some women use the scarves in a more casual or traditional way and tie it under their chin. Others use the scarves to cover their neck and shoulders as well as their hair (Gole, 1996). According to Ruby (2006), in contrast to the term veil that solely refers to a piece of cloth that many Muslim women use to cover their hair, the term hijab encompasses a broader meaning and refers to women's behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, in addition to covering hair, the term hijab conveys meanings of modesty and modest behavior as well. In this way, Ruby (2006) argues that the hijab has an Islamic significance that differentiates it from the veil. Despite this distinction, throughout this research, the terms "veil" and "hijab" are considered synonym and used interchangeably.

A significant number of Muslim women, including international, immigrant, and Canadian-born, are students in Canadian educational institutions. On the other hand, Islam is currently the growing fastest religion in North America (Afridi, 2001; Leonard, 2003; Pipes and Duran, 2002) and constitutes the preferred faith for at least one million people in Canada. According to Leonard (2003), it is expected that Islam will surpass Judaism in terms of the number of adherents and will become second to Christianity. In the United States alone, there are 6 to 9 million Muslims (Hasan, 2001). According to Statistics Canada, Canada had just over one million Muslims in 2011, which represent 3.2% of the nation's total population.

These statistics clearly indicate the significant role that Muslims, including Muslim women, can play in different sectors of Canadian society. Therefore, this research focused on Muslim female university students, as active members of an important racial and religious minority group in Canada. Many North Americans have a tendency to perceive Muslim women as oppressed by Islamic patriarchy and to erase the diversity of their voices and the specificity of their lives in different historical, geographical, and socio-cultural contexts (see Mohanty, 2003). This tendency can negatively impact Muslim women's education. Therefore, I believe that the focus of this study on Muslim female university students is necessary and can play a crucial role in educating Muslim female students in Canadian universities.

Although there is a vast body of literature addressing ways in which different axes of differentiation, such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity intersect and construct the experiences of minority women (see Mohanty, 2003; Bannerji, 1991, 1993; Shohat, 1998; hooks, 1981; Hill-Collins, 1990), there is limited research concentrated on the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion in the construction of Muslim women's experiences (Ahmed, 1992; Alvi et al., 2003; Bullock, 2000; Haddad et al., 2006, Khan, 2000, 2002; Macdonald, 2006; Moallem, 2005). This gap is more pronounced in the context of Canadian educational system (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Rezai-Rashti, 2005; Zine, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) and especially at the level of higher education in Canada.

Existing literature on Muslim female students at the post-secondary education level reveals that research in this area is limited, with majority of existing studies focusing on public schools and not university students. In 2007, Ahmad identified this problem and pointed out that:

Although there is now a wealth of research on Muslim women in relation to identities, arranged marriages, and careers, much of it is limited to studies on Muslim schoolgirls. In comparison, there is a dearth of literature on Muslim women in higher education, their motivations, identities, and experiences at the university level (p. 48).

A review of the literature in this area indicates that the gap in the literature identified by Ahmad in 2007 still exists. Further, the reported literature on Muslim female university students are conducted mainly in the United Kingdom (for example, Ahmad, 2001, 2007; Asmar et al., 2004; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Speck, 1997; Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006), United States and other parts of the world (for example, Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Azimi, 2011; Elnour, 2012; Javed, 2011; McCue, 2008; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007), and not in Canada.

My research entitled “Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada” was an attempt to bridge the gaps mentioned above, and to provide insights into the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities.

1.2 Research Questions

This research aimed to provide answers for one overarching question and three more specific sub-questions. The overall question in this research was: “What are the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities?”

In order to be more specific about Muslim female students’ experiences of higher education in Canada, I identified three different domains to be covered through the sub-questions. These included: (1) the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion and its impact on the process of identity construction of Muslim female university students and their overall experiences of higher education in Canada, (2) the prevailing reductive stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities and Muslim female students’ reactions towards them, and finally (3) the hijab and Muslim female students’ perceptions about it. These domains led to the following three more specific sub-questions of the study:

- 1- How does the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion impact Muslim female students’ identity construction and their overall experiences of higher education in Canada?

- 2- What are Muslim female students' perceptions of, and reactions towards the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities?
- 3- What does the veil and wearing the veil within the university mean to Muslim female students? How do they perceive the hijab?

1.3 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

In this section, I will introduce the main theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have informed and guided this research including (1) third-wave feminist theory, (2) post-colonial feminist theory, and (3) anti-racist feminist theory. In what follows, I justify my choices of theories and illustrate how they have provided this research with essential conceptual and analytical tools for understanding Muslim female students' experiences of higher education in Canada.

This study was conducted under the broad umbrella of feminist theoretical framework. Since feminism considers gender as a significant factor in shaping people's lives, as Lather (1991) has discussed, feminist research has to consider the social construction of gender at the centre of the inquiry; this was the main theoretical stance of this research. However, there are other critical elements in this study that made it necessary to narrow down the specifics of my choice. I highlight these critical elements in the section below by providing a broad explanation about the concept of intersectionality, which plays a crucial role in this study.

The intersectional paradigm focuses on the interlocking and layered systems of oppression based on the impacts of various axes of differentiation such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, age, physical ability, and their intersections on the lives of people. Several scholars (Bhopal & Preston, 2012; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill-Collins, 1990; Khayatt, 2001; McCall, 2005) argue that the complexities of women's experiences of oppression are not understandable without a simultaneous consideration of the impacts of all different axes of differentiation in their lives and identities. However, according to Dei (2005), we are not able to simultaneously explore all of these markers in the formation of myriad forms of oppressions with the same vigor and intensity. As Dei (2005) has argued:

As we recognize the matrix of domination and subordination and conceptualize racism, sexism, and classism as interactive, interlocking, and mutually reinforcing systems of oppression, we must also validate the saliency and visibility of certain forms of oppression (p. 26).

Therefore, in addition to the centrality of gender in this research, I chose to explore the impacts of three other important markers of differentiation, including race, religion, ethnicity, and their intersection on Muslim female students' lives and identities. This is because I believe that these markers have significant impacts on the lives of Diasporic Muslim women. I am well aware that my own positionality as an immigrant Muslim female student in Canada had an impact in my decision to include particular markers of difference in this research (including racial, ethnic, and religion) as discussed above. As Stasiulis (2005) has argued,

...the choices academics and activists make for including or excluding particular social divisions are shaped by their location within historically and geopolitically specific context (p. 39).

As a woman who has always been preoccupied with the issue of sexism, the ways gender regulates the specific experiences of women all over the world have always been at the center of my attention. On the other hand, coming from a middle class family and living in the comfort of my own country where almost everybody shared the same racial and religious profile, I never imagined that one day I would be marginalized based on my racial and religious backgrounds, the very factors that became so salient in my life immediately after immigrating to Canada, and highly impacted my experiences as a Muslim immigrant woman from Global South living in Canada. However, not being aware and familiar with the theories and rationale behind these issues subsequent to my immigration to Canada, making sense of the situation and even confronting my own feelings have always been challenging to me.

Starting my journey as a Ph.D. student in the field of educational studies and in the area of equity and social justice has been very empowering experience for me. This is because it gave me the insight and provided me with the necessary tools to understand issues around social injustice in society. Nonetheless, this experience pushed me to feel the very same gaze that I had already felt in Canadian society at large. However, this was in a different context— i.e. within the Canadian

higher education system. I am well aware that my biography and my multiple identities as an immigrant Muslim female student in Canada have impacted my research in various ways. My interest in the subject of this research, that is, “Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada” was rooted in my own history in the first place. In addition, not only have I witnessed the Orientalist gaze on Muslim women in Canadian society, but I have also experienced it personally in the Canadian society where gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and other markers of differentiation intersect and construct the unique and complex experiences of people. Therefore, as a Muslim female student in Canada, who has witnessed and experienced the Orientalist and colonial gazes on Muslim women in the Canadian society in general, and in its higher education system in particular, I intended to focus on Muslim women as racial and religious subjects.

I am also well aware that my multiple identities as a Muslim female immigrant in Canada made me construct first-hand experiences of oppression in the Canadian society, and, for that reason, I am a suitable candidate to conduct this research. However, as Dei (2005) points out, it does not legitimize an over-emphasis on my personal experiences of oppression and their role in the construction of knowledge. Dei has highlighted the importance of lived, personal experiences of oppression as central factors in the construction of any social knowledge. However, he warns us not to over-valorize personal experiential knowledge and present ourselves ‘as not-to-be-questioned voices of authority merely because we are speaking from experience’ (p. 24).

1.4 Race and Ethnicity

In this section I provide a brief explanation about the concepts of race and ethnicity as I believe these two important concepts play critical roles in highlighting the differences between women in this research. To distinguish between the discourses of racism and ethnicity, I find Barot, Bradley and Fenton’s (1999) explanation to be insightful. According to these authors ‘the two discourses (of race/racism and of ethnicity) appear destined to co-exist with respective differences of emphasis but with a wide terrain of overlap’ (p. 7). To distinguish between the discourses of racism and ethnicity, Barot, Bradley and Fenton have suggested drawing attentions to ‘a list of the dimensions of group boundary definition’ (p. 7), which are determined by the answers to a set of questions including, ‘who is doing the classifying?, are the categories of

group definition chosen or imposed?, what are the bases of group classification?, and are the definitions rooted in experience as opposed to blanket categories of classification?’ (pp. 7-8).

To answer these questions, Barot, Bradley, and Fenton (1999) have argued that in the discourse of race and racism, it is the dominant group who creates the classification. The categories are imposed on subordinated groups, and the systems of classification are based on color and appearance type, and are blanket systems of classification not rooted in the experiences of classified groups. In the discourse of ethnicity, on the other hand, the subordinated group itself creates its own system of classification. The categories are not imposed on the group, and the classifications are based on culture, religion, language and ancestry. They are also rooted in experience- ‘they are related to collective and individual memories and current lives’ (p. 8).

Other scholars (Stasiulis, 2005) have highlighted the difficulties associated with making distinction between concepts of ethnicity and race. Stasiulis contends that while older definitions of race and ethnicity have identified biological and cultural bases for race and ethnicity, respectively, more recent definitions have blurred this distinction. Stasiulis argues that:

This is particularly because racist discourses are increasingly couched in terms of cultural differences rather than notions of biological inferiority and superiority. It is also because many collectivities are using both concepts of race and ethnicity in a self-affirming manner to resist assimilation, pursue cultural difference and autonomy, and produce new cultural forms (p. 51).

Yinger (1981) has highlighted the impact of cultural characteristics by defining an “ethnic group” as:

A segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or by others, to share a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture, and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and cultures are significant ingredients (p. 250).

Lyon (1972), on the other hand, has argued that there is a clear distinction between a “racial category” and an “ethnic group”. One of the most important factors that made such distinction

between the two, in Lyon's view, is that an ethnic group is defined culturally, whereas a racial group is defined physically.

Back to the issue of intersectionality, it is important to note that the centrality of gender as the sole marker of differentiation and the main characteristic of second-wave feminist theory has been the major criticism of second-wave feminists, especially after 1980s. The critiques led to the emergence of third-wave feminism, which is characterized by simultaneous attention to the impacts of various markers of differentiation, such as gender, race, religion and their intersections in women's lives. According to Brah and Phoenix (2004),

Recognition that race, social class and sexuality differentiated women's experiences has disrupted notions of a homogeneous category 'woman' with its attendant assumptions of universality that served to maintain the status quo in relation to race, social class and sexuality, while challenging gendered assumptions (p. 82).

Here, my intention is to draw attention to the limitations of second-wave feminist theory, which has overlooked the importance of intersectionality. In so doing, I embrace third-wave feminist theory, which has the potential to deal with the complexities of women's experiences of myriad forms of oppression, constructed by the intersection of different axes of differentiation in their lives and identities. Such a feminist perspective provided me with the essential conceptual and analytical tools to understand and analyze the complex intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion, and their impact on the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities. Before elaborating on third-wave feminism, however, I will provide a brief introduction to feminist theory and different forms of feminism in the following section.

1.5 Feminist Theory

Feminism entails 'keeping in the forefront of one's mind the lifestyles, activities and interests of more than half of humanity—women.' The theory has a very 'dynamic and complex history', and 'has emerged in different forms, with different titles and meanings, at different times' (Weiner, 2004, p. 4). According to Acker (1993), 'feminist theory - that is, ways of understanding gender relations and the structural subordination of women,' (p. 146) can take different forms in different countries.

There are different perspectives within feminist theory including liberal, socialist, radical (Acker, 1993; Middleton, 1993), post-structural, and postmodern (Gaskell, 2009) feminism. The main focus of liberal feminism is on such key concepts as equal opportunities, sex stereotyping, socialization, role conflict, and sex discrimination (Acker, 1987). It is through these processes that liberal feminists explain “how” women become disadvantaged in society. Liberal feminists try to change women’s status within the existing economic and political frameworks by creating equal opportunities for the sexes and eliminating barriers that prevent women from attaining their full potentials (Acker, 1987). The strength of the liberal approach lies in its documentation of gender discrimination, sexist text, and practices, while its main shortcoming is the neglect of class and race analyses in its discourse (Weiler, 1988).

On the other hand, socialist and radical feminism, through a much deeper analysis of the structures that constrain, try to explain “why” such disadvantages occur for women (Acker, 1993). While socialist feminism is mostly focused on women’s positions within the economy and family, as well as on class conflicts and differences between women (Acker, 1993; Middleton, 1993), radical feminism emphasizes patriarchal gender relations as the key issues to produce women’s subordination (Acker, 1993).

According to Acker (1993), liberal feminism tends to provide an individualistic and more psychological explanation for women’s subordination and puts the greatest responsibility on the shoulders of individual women, for their lack of confidence, assertiveness, and independence, or for their low aspirations and ambitions. On the other hand, socialist and radical feminism try to provide a structural explanation of the problem by viewing sociological factors such as class conflicts or patriarchal structures as responsible for women’s subordination (Acker, 1993). Acker believes that these two different views about women’s subordination lead to different strategies. While introducing equal opportunity policies or encouraging women to become more assertive and success-oriented (as suggested in liberal feminism) is more attainable, ending capitalism or changing patriarchal gender relations (as suggested in socialist and radical feminism) seems unattainable in the immediate future.

In addition, poststructuralist and postmodern feminism are introduced by Gaskell (2009) as two other important feminist perspectives. According to Gaskell, postmodern approaches emphasize

power relations and understanding the ways gender relations function as relations of power. Postmodern feminists believe in the shifting and local construction of identity, meaning, and power, and highlight the fact that there is not any fixed, unchanging female experience, but a constructed female experience in diverse contexts.

Similarly, Poststructuralist feminists consider subjectivity as discursively constructed, multiple in nature, and not fixed. They believe that there is not any pre-determined and fixed concept of womanhood or manhood as the basis for feminism. In addition, the meaning of women shifts over history and over diverse contexts as this form of subject constitution intersects with other forms. Poststructuralist feminists also consider power as an important dynamic in the construction of subjectivity. According to Yates (1993),

Poststructuralist writings in feminism and in education, especially those associated with the widespread taking up of the work of Foucault, have been interested in the unmasking of power inherent in claims to knowledge and truth (p. 168).

As Bhopal and Preston (2012) have pointed out, ‘poststructuralists aim to deconstruct perceptions of the world and to challenge what appears to be normal or natural’ (p. 3). Generally speaking, poststructuralist ideas have heavily affected feminist discussions around the issue of essentialist thinking about women in the 1990s (Nicholson, 1997). Feminism and post-structuralism both share common basis for struggle. Haw et al., (1998) have discussed this common basis and pointed out that:

Both feminism and post-structuralism challenge traditional power based knowledge from the political perspective in the sense of deployment of power, but the feminist challenge arises from a direct concern—that of the oppression of women (p. 27).

Therefore, both poststructuralist and postmodern frameworks encourage women to promote their critical awareness of their subordination within existing discourses and practices (Lather, 1991; Weiner, 2004).

In addition to the different forms of feminism introduced above, Shohat (1998), in her book entitled “Talking Visions, Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age,” has discussed the

bases of another approach in feminism, namely, multicultural feminist approach. According to Shohat (1998):

Multicultural feminism moves beyond the earlier critique of western feminism and refuses to establish the hierarchy of oppression based on racial, gendered, national, sexual, and class-based struggles; rather it stresses the relationality and intersectionality of all these axes of stratification (cited in Rezai-Rashti, 2005, p. 87).

Indeed, by putting the two terms 'feminism' and 'multicultural' together, Shohat (1998) has highlighted the 'political intersectionality' (p. 1) of class, racial, national, and gender-based struggles, which are not in isolation but are interwoven. As Shohat (1998) has pointed out:

Multicultural feminism as outlined here avoids the egocentric essentialism of 'I am, therefore, I resist' (Chandra Talpade Mohanty). It attempts to remap the shape-shifting modalities of oppression and empowerment, recognizing that oppression and empowerment are themselves relational terms. Individuals can occupy more than one position, being empowered on one axis (class, say) but not on another (such as sexuality) (p. 4).

Multicultural feminism rejects 'fixed, essentialist and reductionist formulation of identity' (p. 9) and celebrates hybridities. However, according to Shohat (1998), this does not mean that it is no longer possible to draw boundaries between privilege and disfranchisement in this approach. According to Shohat,

....an anti-essential multicultural feminist project is obliged to formulate identities as situated in geographical space and 'riding' historical moment, to work through a politics whereby the decentring of identities and the celebration of hybridities does not also mean that it is no longer possible to draw boundaries between privilege and disfranchisement (p. 6).

Therefore, Shohat belongs to the paradigm of intersectionality, and, in this sense, her arguments are far from those of the First World white feminism and very similar to those of post-colonial and anti-racist feminism, which will be discussed in this chapter.

1.6 Emergence of Third-Wave Feminism

In the 1970s and 1980s, with the aim of highlighting the diversity of women's experiences and challenging the Eurocentric and essentialist notions of womanhood which were projected and theorized by white liberal feminists, many feminist scholars of color and those of the Third World criticized the way white feminists had portrayed a homogeneous universal picture of all women (Bannerji, 1993; Hill-Collins, 1990, 1998; hooks, 1981, Mohanty, 1991, 2003; Ng, 1993, 1995). The major critique of these scholars was focused on the fact that white liberal feminists had not paid much attention to the diversity of women's experiences, but had been concerned mostly about their own white, middle-class, heterosexual experiences. According to Bhopal and Preston (2012),

The focus for black feminism was to challenge white Eurocentric knowledge which was taken as the norm. There was a need to understand and deconstruct the concept of woman and analyze this in relation to race, class, gender and sexuality (p. 2).

This move was followed by a major theoretical debate about "essentialism" in the 1990s, as clearly portrayed by Nicholson (1997). Nicholson noted that the debate about "essentialism" was rooted in the second-wave feminists' debates, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, about the issue of differences between men and women. According to Nicholson (1997), in those years, two contradictory beliefs existed as a part of the general culture. The first belief indicated that women and men were basically the same, while the second one argued that men and women were deeply different as imposed by nature.

In order to change the status quo, second-wave feminism, especially liberal feminism, drew heavily on the belief that women and men are basically the same (Nicholson, 1997). On the other hand, since radical and socialist feminists witnessed political limitations associated with the notion of women and men being the same, they started to emphasize the idea that women and men are different and thus, introduced "gynocentric" feminism (Nicholson, 1997). However, as Nicholson added, gynocentric feminism suffered from one serious weakness: It tended to emphasize the commonalities, denied the differences amongst women, and simply overlooked the diverse experiences of women of different racial, sexual, and class profiles; it somehow promoted essentialist thinking about women.

Subsequent to this debate, the contributions of feminist scholars of color initiated a significant deviation from theorizing single categories of oppression and advocated for embracing a more complex interconnected system of multiple oppressions. Black feminists claimed that second-wave feminists ignored ‘at least one and sometimes more of the simultaneous and interlocking axes of racial, class, and gender power within a matrix of domination’ (Stasiulis, 2005, p. 36). They started to theorize the interlocking system of oppression based on race, class, and gender. This move finally led to the creation of a new theoretical perspective, that is, third-wave feminism, which called for a ‘greater acceptance of, and emphasis on, complexities, ambiguities, hybridity, intersectionality, and fluidity’ (Mitchell & Karaian, 1995, p. 61).

The aforementioned features provided great potential for third-wave feminist theory to be utilized in my research, which particularly dealt with the impact of the intersection of different markers of differentiation on the educational experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities. The concept of intersectionality and its role in constructing black women’s oppression, as the most important theoretical contribution of black feminism (Hill-Collins, 1990, 1991, 1998; hooks, 1981, 1984) deserves special attention. Hence, it will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

1.7 Theoretical Issues in Intersectionality

In 1991, in an influential law review article in the U.S., Crenshaw used the term intersectionality (Choo & Ferree, 2010; McCall, 2005). Other scholars have also discussed the issue of intersectionality and the way the intersection of different markers of differentiations such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion construct specific experiences of people (for example, see Banerji, 1991, 1993; Bhopal & Preston, 2012; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Hill-Collins, 1990; Khayatt, 2001; McCall, 2005; Mohanty, 1991, 2003; Shohat, 1998). Several scholars have defined the concept of intersectionality. For example, Brah and Phoenix (2004) defined this concept as:

Signifying the complex, irreducible varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that

different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands (p. 76).

Hill-Collins (1990) also argues that 'intersectional paradigm reminds us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice' (p. 18). In addition, according to her, there is a distinction between intersectionality and matrix of domination. Hill-Collins points out that:

Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example intersection of race and gender, or sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigm reminds us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are usually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression (p. 18).

Further, Hill-Collins (1990) has highlighted four different domains that organize any particular matrix of domination and explained:

Each domain serves a particular purpose. The structural domain organizes the oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensues (p. 276).

Mirza (2013) has also defined the concept of intersectionality and its impact on women's real lives. Mirza argued:

Intersectionality draws our attention to the ways in which identities, as subject positions, are not reducible to just one or two or three or even more dimensions layered onto each other in an additive or hierarchical way. Rather intersectionality refers to the converging and conterminous ways in which the differentiated and variable organizing logics of race, class and gender and other social divisions such as sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, culture, religion, and belief structure the material conditions which produce economic, social and political inequality in women's real lived lives (p. 6)

Bhopal and Preston (2012) highlighted intersectionality as a model to analyze the issue of difference ‘in which difference itself becomes a defining feature of Otherness’ (p. 1). They explain that ‘intersectionality has been used by feminists to address essentialist models of social theory by acknowledging that not all women’s experiences are the same’ (p. 2).

Mohanty (1991) also emphasized the differences amongst women based on their specific social, historical, geographical, and economical location. In fact, through her work, Mohanty presented one of the most important critiques of western feminism and amongst other scholars (Bannerji 1991; Brah 1992; Friedman 1995; Shohat, 1998; Shohat & Stam 1994) elaborated on the meanings of the notions of relationality and positionality. She critiqued most western feminist discourses for erasing the historical and geographical specificity of women’s lives in the Third World. Mohanty believed that in the process of the discursive production of the “Third World women”, which is characterized by a biological, sociological, and anthropological essentialist thinking about women, specific historical differences between women become impossible to analyze.

In addition, Mohanty (1991) argued that, through the production of the “Third World Difference”, western feminism has exercised its power over “Third World Women” and has colonized the fundamental complexities of the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, and races in Third World countries. Thus, Mohanty criticized western scholarship for ignoring women’s agency and for portraying a universalized, monolithic, and homogenous picture of “Third World women” as subjugated and in need of rescue.

By considering the specific location of every woman in her social and historical relations, Mohanty (1991, 2003) highlighted the heterogeneity of subject and advocated for politics of location. Therefore, according to Mohanty, since every woman occupies a very specific location based on her race, class, and nationality, one cannot talk about a universal experience of oppression shared amongst all women globally. In addition, in Mohanty’s thinking, personal experiences and background play a major role in constructing multiple identities for women, which is, of course, unstable and by no means fixed. Mohanty (1991) has tried to highlight this notion by stressing and drawing on her own multiple identities. For example, she acknowledged

her multiple identities through introducing herself as a member of the secular elite in India, as a woman of color in U.S. academia, and as a foreigner in Nigeria.

Notions of “positionality”, “relationality”, and “relational positionality” introduced and discussed by anti-racist and post-colonial feminists such as Mohanty (1991, 2003) and others (Bannerji, 1991; Brah, 1991; Friedman, 1995; Shohat & Stam, 1994) have had a huge impact on anti-essentializing feminist efforts to highlight the fluidity of women’s identities ‘at the crossroads of different systems of power and domination’ (Stasiulis, 2005, p. 52). Stasiulis (2005) highlighted the fluid and contradictory nature of intersectional identities and posited that:

The theorizing of the complex intersectionality within the lives of ethnically and racially heterogeneous women has begun to move away from schemas that speak only of oppression, domination, and victimization while ignoring women’s own agency in negotiating their identities and altering their material and cultural conditions (p. 52).

Stasiulis (2005) referred to narratives or scripts of relational positionality discussed by Friedman (1995) to highlight the fact that since power flows in many different directions, therefore, an oppressed person in a particular position can also be an oppressor in another position depending on the particular site of power (gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.). In this way, Stasiulis elaborated on the dynamics of shifting and contradictory subject positions.

Similarly, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) has highlighted the multidimensional nature of people’s experiences and argued that one-dimensional approach to analyze race or gender is not able to analyze the complex multidimensional experiences of black women. According to Crenshaw (1989),

Black women can experience discrimination in a number of ways and that contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through intersection, may flow in one direction; it may flow in another (p. 321).

Hall (1996b) highlights the role of the dominant power in the process of producing identities and argues that:

Identities emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity- an identity in its traditional meaning (that is, in all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation) (p. 4).

Neider (2009) discussed the ‘framing of identity’ which is ‘at once both a cultural process as well as a political endeavor’ (p. 6) and argued that ‘identity is constantly in flux due to the power of others to (re)inscribe meaning onto our being. Those who define groups of people or particular individuals occupy privileged subject positions within United States or western society’ (p. 6).

Neider (2009) highlighted ‘naming’ as one of the processes through which ‘identity comes into being’ (p. 6), and believed that the process of ‘naming’ works based on a ‘comparison to an imaginary norm-referenced group’ (pp. 6-7). Neider discussed ‘a great chain of being as the measuring rod against which all are compared’ (p. 7) and located Christian white male at the top of the chain with other groups along the chain such as ‘the white female, the black male, the black female, children and animals’ (p. 7). Neider (2009) argued that:

Because this notion is so embedded within Western conceptions of identity all are measured against the now normalized and hidden hierarchical system of stratification. The great chain of being is a taken for granted, underlying paradigm to traditional studies of identity and development (p. 7).

Khayatt (2000, 2001) also acknowledges the role of ‘those in power’ to label people and ‘to differentiate between themselves and those they want to exclude’ which is based on ‘race, class, ethnicity, and other factors’ (Khayatt, 2001, p. 79). Khayatt (2000) states:

Those who provide us with the standard measure, what I call the “default position” in society- be they white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual or economically privileged- while they do not and do not need to name themselves, have the power to define others. Others’ identities- as a person of color, female, lesbian or gay, poor or disabled- provide them with a binary opposite location against which theirs can be established (p. 262).

Introducing the concept of intersectionality discussed above is probably the most important contribution of women’s studies and other related fields (McCall, 2005). According to Hill-

Collins (1990), intersectional paradigms have been useful in understanding the way domination is organized. Hill-Collins believed that while intersectional paradigms have provided new interpretations for African-American women's experiences, they have been also useful in explaining the experiences of other historically identifiable groups.

Despite the usefulness and effectiveness of employing the concept of intersectionality in analyzing the complex experiences of women, Laponce and Safran (1996) argue that, intersectional paradigm has caused complexities in the conceptualization of multiple identities as adding every layer of identity has made this conceptualization more difficult. This is because each extra layer of identity has 'an entirely different relation to the world in terms of power. One may be disempowered as a woman, but empowered as white and middle-class' (p. 72). According to Laponce and Safran (1996):

Moving from considering single categories-women/men, black/white or even liberal feminism/socialist feminism/radical feminism- to reflecting on the intersections of even two equally important categories and, more importantly, three or four equally important categories, is a quantum step in complexity (p. 68).

The multiplicity of subject position and the ever changing nature of Diaspora identities is discussed by several scholars (for example, see Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990, 1996a, 1996b). Hall (1996a, 1996b) offers a non-essentialist concept of identity, which does not refer to 'that stable core of the self' (Hall, 1996b, p. 3). This notion of identity acknowledges the fact that identities are not unified or singular, but they always are 'in the process of change and transformation' (Hall, 1996b, p. 4). In addition, Hall (1990) highlights two different ways to think about cultural identity. According to Hall, the first view, which has a critical impact in the post-colonial struggles, represents people with a shared history and historical experiences as 'one people, with stable, unchanging and continued frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history' (p. 223). The second view, although acknowledging the existence of similarities, highlights the profound differences between people's identities. According to Hall, in this view 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past' (p. 225).

Although identity is ‘neither fixed nor singular’ (Brah, 1996, p. 123), according to Brah (1996), it tends to manifest specific patterns, like a kaleidoscope. As Brah (1996) has argued:

Indeed, identity may be understood as that very process by which the multiplicity, contradiction, and instability of subjectivity is signified as having coherence, continuity, stability; as having a core- a continually changing core but the sense of a core nonetheless - that at any given moment is enunciated as the ‘I’(pp. 123-124).

In addition, since identities are culturally constructed through social relations and experiences (Brah, 1996, Hall, 1996a, 1996b), therefore, any question about identity is interconnected with questions about social relations and experiences. As Brah (1996) notes, ‘the identity of the Diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given; it is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively’ (p. 183).

Parallel to feminists’ discussions about the concept of intersectionality, the impacts of ethnicity and religion as important markers of differentiations in women’s lives have also captured the attention of feminist scholars (Andrew, 1996; Butler, 1999; Moghadam, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Third World feminists and Muslim women have contributed to this discussion (for example, see Ahmed, 1992; Alvi et al., 2003; Bullock, 2000; Haddad et al., 2006; Hoodfar, 1993; Khan, 2000, 2002; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Rezai-Rashti, 1999, 2005; Zine, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). They have argued that western feminism is not capable of effectively dealing with the issues of all minority women.

Other scholars have also emphasized the need for moving away from the notion of fixed, static, and authentic identity and culture, especially when dealing with ethnic and religious minority groups. For example, in “Covering Islam”, Said (1997) has based his argument on the fact that Islam is (mis)represented in Orientalist thoughts and highlighted the ways in which media project monolithic hostile pictures of Islam. Said believed that in the western’s perception of Islam, the diversity amongst Muslims is neglected and all Muslims are perceived as a homogenous group who ‘think exactly alike since the seventh century’ (p. xxxii).

Through a careful analysis of the notions of nationalism, modernity, feminism, postcoloniality, and their intersection, Abu-Lughod (1998) has also emphasized the need to work against universalizing discourses about patriarchy, Islam, and oppression, and the need to consider historical, regional, political, and economical specificities of women's lives. Other scholars have discussed the ever-changing nature of ethnicity and the shifting nature of the boundaries between ethnicities (Bhabha, 1994; Anzaldua, 1987; Spivak, 1993; Mc Andrew, 2009; Minh-Ha 1989; Hall, 1996). The aforementioned factors are crucial to my research, which deals directly with Muslims as one of the ethnic and religious minority groups in Canada.

1.8 Anti-Racist Feminism

As mentioned earlier, in the early 1980s, with the contributions of feminist scholars who were critical of the racist, colonialist, and Eurocentric assumptions of the feminist movement, a distinct body of knowledge around the intersection of feminism and anti-racist discourse, and that of feminism and post-colonial discourses, was produced. Consequently, anti-racist feminism and post-colonial feminism emerged as two important by-products of third-wave feminism. These two theories are not mutually exclusive or independent of each other, but share many common interests. However, for the sake of clarity, here, I discuss them separately.

According to Rezai-Rashti (2005), black women were amongst the first group of women of color to systematically challenge the white feminist movement. The centrality of race/racism for women of color stemmed from the fact that white feminism had neglected any race/racism consideration in its analysis of oppression (Rezai-Rashti, 2005). It also partly stemmed from the lack of any consideration of racial factors in the analysis of socialist feminism, which was focused on the study of interplay of class, gender, and capitalism (Stasiluis, 2005, p. 41). Amongst black feminists, hooks and Hill-Collins are two prominent theorists who have elaborated on the complex relationship of feminism and anti-racism.

hooks (1981) has argued that there are manifestations of racial apartheid in feminist movement, in the same way that it has existed in the American society and stated that 'while those feminists who argue that sexual imperialism is more endemic to all societies than racial imperialism are probably correct, American society is one in which racial imperialism supersedes sexual imperialism' (p. 122).

hooks (1981) has also pointed to the existence of sexist-racist attitudes toward black women in white feminism's body, and believed that white feminism perpetuated racism through its denial of the existence of non-white women in America. It also perpetuated sexism through the way it assumed that sexuality is the sole self-defining trait of white women, and denied their racial identity.

hooks (1981) believed in the existence of racism within the women's rights movement and asserted:

Every women movement in America from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation. The first white women's rights advocates were never seeking social equality for all women; they were seeking social equality for white women (p. 124).

hooks (1981) has also highlighted the interconnected relations between racism and sexism and argued that by no means 'we can divorce the issue of race from sex, or sex from race' (p. 12). According to hooks (1984), 'feminist theory would have much to offer if it showed women ways in which racism and sexism are immutably connected rather than pitting one struggle against the other, or blatantly dismissing racism' (p. 52).

In addition, hooks (1981) has criticized white feminism for excluding black women from the vast body of its literature and for its failure to deal with the issues of racism and sexism in an effective way and pointed out 'when black people are talked about, the focus tends to be on black men, and when women are talked about, the focus tends to be on white women' (p. 140).

According to hooks (1981), the exclusion of black women is well evident in the analogies that have been drawn between "women" and "blacks" in many feminist writings. She believed that with making this analogy, the term "women" was considered synonymous with "white women" and the term "blacks" synonymous with "black men".

hooks (1981) has also argued that women's rights movement did not appreciate the fact that there are various degrees of discrimination or oppression, and 'not all women are equally oppressed because some women are able to use their class, race and educational privilege to effectively resist sexist oppression' (p. 145).

Similarly, Hill-Collins (1998) has pointed to racism in white feminist movement and argued that ‘...black feminism must come to term with a white feminist agenda incapable of seeing its own racism, as well as a black nationalist one resistant to grappling with its own sexism’ (p.70).

Hill-Collins (1990) has explained three dimensions of black women’s oppression, including economic, political, and ideological, and highlighted sexist and racist ideologist within US culture. She has stated:

Ideology refers to the body of ideas reflecting the interests of a group of people. Within U.S. culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal, and inevitable. In this context, certain assumed qualities that are attached to black women are used to justify oppression (p. 5).

The exclusion of the political concerns of black women in the women’s movement, and the misrecognition of the lives of black women even when they were included, played a major role in the argument that women’s movement has been racist (Donald & Rattansi, 1992).

Hill-Collins has also contributed to the standpoint theory by introducing the concept of outsider-within position of black women, and believed in women’s ability to construct knowledge claims based on their specific experiences. Standpoint theory, founded by Haraway (1997) is one of the most influential theories in feminism, which asserts that knowledge claims are socially located and knowledge is better sought at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchies. As Haraway (1997) has pointed out, ‘standpoints are cognitive-emotional-political achievements, crafted out of located social-historical-bodily experience’ (p. 304).

Hill-Collins (1990) believed that even in academic environments, black women intellectuals occupy outsider-within positions since their ideas are somehow excluded from mainstream academic discourses. She stated that:

Just as theories, epistemologies, and facts produced by any group of individuals represent the standpoints and interests of their creators, the very definition of who is legitimated to do intellectual work is not only politically constructed, but is changing. Reclaiming black feminist intellectual traditions involves much more than developing black feminist

analysis using standard epistemological criteria. It also involves challenging the very terms of intellectual discourse itself (p. 15).

To explain black women's diverse responses to common challenges, Hill-Collins (1990) has highlighted black women's individual differences and has argued that there is not a homogeneous black women's standpoint. According to Hill-Collins:

Despite the common challenges confronting African-American women as a group, individual black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion (p. 27).

In this way, Hill-Collins (1990) has interrogated the concept of essentialized, universalized women and observed that:

It may be more accurate to say that a black women's collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges. Because it both recognizes and aims to incorporate heterogeneity in crafting black women's oppositional knowledge, this black women's standpoint eschews essentialism in favor of democracy (p. 28).

Hill-Collins (1990) has pointed out that African-American women, similar to any other subordinated groups, 'not only have developed a distinctive Black women's standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge' (p. 252). In addition, black women did not use positivist paradigms to rearticulate a Black women standpoint; many of them have had access to an alternative epistemology and used different standards to validate knowledge. Although, according to Hill-Collins, this alternative Black feminist epistemology has been devalued by dominant knowledge validation process, it is widely accepted among African-American women.

Dorothy Smith has also contributed to the standpoint theory. Smith (1987), who conceptualized women's everyday world as problematic, believed that feminist methodology should be based on women's concrete experiences and standpoints. Smith argues that 'a standpoint in the everyday world is the fundamental grounding of modes of knowing developed in a ruling apparatus' (p. 108). Smith also explicitly discussed the nature of 'an everyday world as a sociological

problematic' (p. 99) and believed that this conception '...presents a basis for a sociology that, like Marx and Engel's conception of the materialist method, begins not within the discourse but in the actual daily social relations between individuals'. (p. 99)

Smith has argued that 'the concepts and methods of sociology as a discourse constitute women as object rather than subject' (p. 97). It also excludes women and their perspectives from "ruling apparatus" of culture. Smith adds that 'the institutionalized practices of excluding women from the ideological work of society are the reasons we have a history constructed largely from the perspective of men, and largely about men' (p. 35).

It should be mentioned that engagement of feminist scholars with anti-racist discourses is not limited to black feminists. White feminists were also involved with anti-racist feminism; these feminists tried to theorize and conceptualize the notion of "whiteness" and ways in which white women might engage in anti-racist struggles as well (Rezai-Rashti, 2005). The engagement of white women in anti-racist struggles is possible as many scholars have discussed the issues associated with essentialist thinking about black and third World feminist struggles, and emphasized the importance of combating them. For example, Brah (1992) suggested not considering black and white feminism as two "essentially fixed oppositional categories," and believed that the relationship between black and white feminism should be viewed in a historical context and in relation to the material and discursive practices. To move away from essentialist notion of Third World feminist struggles, Mohanty (2003) suggested the idea of 'imagined community' (pp. 46-47) borrowed from Benedict Anderson, which offers political (the way we think about race, class, and gender) rather than biological (color, or sex) or cultural bases for alliance. As such, she believed that women of all colors, including white women, can participate in this imagined community.

1.9 Post-Colonial Feminism

Generally speaking, there are parallel concerns between feminist theory and postcolonial discourses. As Ashcraft et al., (1995) have discussed, 'feminist and post-colonial discourses both seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant' (p. 233). The parallel concerns of feminism and post-colonial discourses have motivated many theorists to study the intersection of the two and, in this way, a distinct body of knowledge has been produced by post-colonial

feminists (Mohanty et al., 1991; Mohanty, 1991, 2003; Peterson, 1984, Katrak, 1989; Minh-Ha, 1989; Suleri, 1992; Oyewumi, 1997; Spivak, 1999).

Post-colonial feminists have tried to systematically explain and theorize the mechanisms through which western dominant culture historically has colonized other cultures and is still willing, implicitly or explicitly, to continue to do so. Most importantly, post-colonial feminists try to demonstrate the impacts of this colonial gaze on the everyday lives and experiences of “doubly colonized” women (Oyewumi, 1997). The notion of “double colonization”, as the ‘catch-phrase of post-colonial and feminist discourses in the 1980s’, refers to the fact that ‘women in formerly colonized societies were doubly-colonized by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies’ (Ashcraft et al., 1995, p. 233).

The term “Orientalism” introduced by Said² (1978), has been a major force behind the formation of post-colonial discourses (Emberley, 1993; Yegenoglu, 1998). Said referred to general definition of Orientalism as ‘a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’ (p. 25).

According to Said (1997), the general basis of Orientalist thought is ‘an imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, ‘different’ one called the Orient, the other, also known as ‘our’ world, called the Occident or the West’ (p. 4).

As Said (1978) has argued, Orientalism is ‘a Western style for dominating, restricting, and having authority over the Orient’ (p. 3). Referring to the fact that ‘the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is a relationship of power, of domination, and of varying degrees of complex hegemony’ (p. 5), and demonstrating the way the Occident portrays a superior position for itself as advanced and civilized but depicts an inferior picture of the Orient as underdeveloped and uncivilized, Said (1978, 1997) has pinpointed to the relation between representation, knowledge, and power. He has stated that ‘the underlying theme of Orientalism is the affiliation of knowledge and power’ (Said, 1997, p. xiix). In this way, Said has demonstrated the close relationship between western knowledge and its wish to possess power (Yegenoglu,

² Said did not discuss gender issues in his works. However, later on, feminists, particularly post-colonial feminists, used his arguments to elaborate on women’s status as Others.

1998). In “Covering Islam”, Said (1997) discussed the way western coverage of Islam, which does not necessarily manifest truth or accuracy, is produced by the political influences of people in position of power. According to Said,

Underlying every interpretation of other cultures—especially of Islam—is the choice facing the individual scholar or intellectual: whether to put intellect at the service of power or at the service of criticism, community, dialogue, and moral sense (p. 172).

It is through this process that, as pointed out by Zine (2002), ‘the white man’s burden or mission civilisatrice became a project of political, economic, and cultural domination sustained ideologically through knowledge production about the Orient as an atavistic place in need of modernization and rescue’ (p.10).

This clearly reminds us of Spivak’s (1999) remarks in her well-known essay “can the subaltern speak?” about the responsibility of white men to rescue brown women from brown men. By referring to the concept of “epistemic violence” Spivak explains how the west tries, firstly, to dominate Eurocentric ways of knowing and thinking, and, secondly, to destruct non-western ways of knowing. Thus, according to Spivak, subaltern’s way of thinking is always marginalized by the dominant power.

Mohanty (1991) also has used the term “colonialism” to demonstrate western scholarship’s reproduction of unequal relations of power, and to show ‘the global hegemony of western scholarship—that is the production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas’ (p. 56). Therefore, as Emberley (1993) has argued, ‘post-colonialism has shifted the critique of colonialism from strictly economic and political determinations to ideological ones’ (p. 6).

Within a dominant Eurocentric discourse, the project of decolonization is introduced by many post-colonial feminists as a powerful way of resistance and decolonizing culture (Katrak, 1989; Smith, 2005; Mohanty, 2003). Katrak (1989) has highlighted the intellectual and political domination of western theoretical models over post-colonial writers and believed that post-colonial texts could be viewed as powerful tools for decolonizing culture. Tuck (2009) has referred to ‘theorizing back as a sister component in a larger decolonizing project’ (p. 112) and

believed that it ‘contains a critique of the ways in which white stream voices are constructed as rigorous, logical, reasoned, and valid while voices outside of the white stream are considered experiential and emotional, representing devalued ways of knowing’ (p. 112).

Seggie and Mabokela (2009) believed that ‘post-colonial theory allows for the colonized to be the subject of legitimate knowledge’ (p. 13) and, for that reason, it can be the best choice to explore the experiences of colonized people. They have argued:

By using this theoretical perspective to unearth the taken for granted unequal and uneven distribution of power, knowledge, and resources, one can begin to explore the consequences of globalization on the people who are relocating around the globe and the local environment to which they move. This is particularly important for Muslims who reside in predominantly Christian societies (p. 13).

In this sense post-colonial feminist theory along with the theories of third-wave feminism and anti-racist feminism are the best theoretical lenses for this research.

1.10 Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the study in detail. In this chapter, I discussed the main problem which motivated me to conduct this search. It is argued that in the aftermath of September 11th tragic terrorist attacks in the World Trade Center in the United States, Muslim women, especially those who can be easily identified as Muslims, namely, veiled Muslim women, have been at the center of the negative attention of western society more than any other moments in the history of North America (see Haddad et al., 2006).

I also discussed the gap in existing literature, which prompted me to conduct research in this area. Research focusing on Muslim women in higher education is limited, with most of the existing studies conducted on school girls and not university students. Further, the reported studies on Muslim women in higher education are conducted mainly in the United Kingdom, United States, and other parts of the world (for example, Ahmad, 2001, 2007; Asmar et al., 2004; Azimi, 2011; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Elnour, 2012; Hanson, 2009; Mc Cue, 2008; Speck, 1997; Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006) and not in Canada.

The chapter also introduced the main question as well as three sub-questions of the study. The main question of this research was “What are the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities?” This question entailed three more specific sub-questions. The first sub-question dealt with the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion and its impact on Muslim female students’ identity construction and their overall experiences of higher education in Canada. The second sub-question was about the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities and Muslim women’s reactions towards them. Finally, the third sub-question was about the hijab and the way Muslim women perceive the veil and wearing the veil in Canadian universities. I also sought Muslim women’s opinions about the veil as a signifier of Muslim women’s oppression in Canada.

The last section of the chapter introduced the main theoretical and conceptual frameworks which informed the study. These included (1) third-wave feminist theory, (2) post-colonial feminist theory, and (3) anti-racist feminist theory. I justified my choices of theories and illustrated how they have guided and supported this research, and provided conceptual and analytical tools for understanding Muslim female students’ experiences of higher education in Canada.

In Chapter 2, I will review the existing Canadian and international literature dealing with the subject of Muslim women. I will also highlight the relevance of these studies to my research, whenever applicable. Chapter 3 provides adequate answers to the most important methods and methodological questions related to my research. Chapter 4 will introduce the participants in the study and discuss the specific location of each participant in terms of her race, ethnicity, age, marital status. The chapter will also explain the ways in which the specific location of each participant has affected her experiences of higher education in Canada. Chapter 5 specifically deals with the findings of the study and discusses the themes and subcategories that emerged from the interviews. Finally, Chapter 6 will provide the concluding thoughts. In Chapter 6, I will summarize research findings and discuss their significance and implications for educating Muslim women in Canadian universities. I will also discuss the limitations of my research and provide suggestions for future research in this area.

Chapter 2

2. Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I discuss a selection of the existing Canadian and international literature dealing with the subject of Muslim women. For the purpose of my research, I divide the existing literature into two different categories. The first category of the literature directly explores the educational experiences of Muslim students, which has been mostly conducted in the context of public high-schools in different parts of the world (for example, Ali, 2012; Azimi, 2011; Basit, 1996, 1997; Hanson, 2009; Haw et al., 1998; Javed, 2011; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 1999, 2005; Watt, 2011b; Zine, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006a, 2007). It also includes studies that have examined the educational experiences of Muslim female university students (for example, Ahmad, 2001, 2007, 2009; Aslam, 2011; Elnour, 2012; Gregory, 2014; Hamdan, 2006; Hojati, 2011; Mc Cue, 2008; McDermott-Levy, 2010, 2011; Mir, 2009a; Shavarini, 2001; Speck, 1997). In addition, this body of the literature includes studies that have dealt with the effects of college environment on minority students' academic achievement as well (for example, Brown, 2009; El-Haj, 2007; Jenkins, 2001; Johnson, 2003; Karandish, 2014; Montelongo, 2003; Watson et al., 2002).

The second body of the literature deals with Muslim women in a general context that includes four different but interconnected themes, including (1) Muslim women and the veil; (2) Muslim women, labor market, and workplace discrimination; (3) Muslim women and popular media; and (4) Muslim women and construction of their identities.

Since this research was focused on the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian higher education, I will first discuss the body of the literature that deals with Muslim women and education, including higher education, followed by the literature that deals with the effects of college atmosphere on minority students' academic achievement. Then, in the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the studies that have considered Muslim women in general. I believe that

these studies are directly relevant to my research. Their findings are insightful and reveal some of the challenges that Muslim female students face within Canadian higher educational institutions.

2.1 Muslim Female Students and Their Educational Experiences

In this section, I explore the literature that focuses on the educational experiences of Muslim school girls in public schools as well as Muslim female students at the post-secondary, college, and university levels in different parts of the world. I also highlight the relevance of these studies to my study, whenever applicable. Different studies on Muslim female students have highlighted many different themes in educating Muslim female students. For clarity's sake, I categorize these studies in this section and discuss the themes identified in each category separately.

It should be mentioned that while there is an abundance of studies on Muslim women in a general context, there are limited studies on the educational experiences of Muslim female students. In addition, within this limited body of the literature, most of the studies have been conducted in the U.K., the U.S., and other parts of the world (for example, Abbas, 2003; Ahmad, 2001, 2007, 2009; Asmar et al., 2004; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Brown, 2009; Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006), and not in Canada (for example, Ali & Bagheri, 2009; 2006; Elnour, 2012; Mir, 2009; Speck, 1997; Muhtaseb, 2007). Further, a large number of these studies have been conducted on Muslim school girls in public schools, and not in universities (for example, Ali, 2012; Azimi, 2011; Haw et al., 1998; Basit, 1996, 1997; Diab, 2009; Javed, 2011; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 1999; Zine, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006a, 2007). As a result, it is evident that studies exploring Muslim female university students' experiences of higher education, especially in Canada, are very scarce. Therefore, this research was an attempt to bridge this gap and provide further insights into the educational experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian institutions of higher education.

2.1.1 Muslim Female Students and Their Interactions with White Non-Muslim Students

A number of the studies have explored Muslim female students and their interactions with the majority white non-Muslim students (Brown, 2009; Gunel, 2007; Stafiej, 2012). For example, the issue of friendship and the challenges regarding establishing friendships with the host student

community is highlighted by Brown (2009) who has investigated the adjustment experiences of a group of international university students in the U.K. Brown, identified the theme ‘friendship’ (p. 439) and the obstacles that international students face in befriending British students as one of the major themes of the study. Many international students who participated in Brown’s study pointed to their need and failure to befriend their host peers in England. Inapproachability of British students as the members of the host community, and their lack of interest in international students were mentioned by the participants as responsible factors that have inhibited British students from befriending them. Muslim international students who participated in this study also highlighted other factors such as Islamophobia and racial prejudices of the host community. By referring to the experiences of one of the veiled participants who ‘was verbally and physically attacked on the street’ (p. 448) Brown (2009) has discussed the significance of the hijab and elaborated on the Islamophobia and racism that many Muslim international students experienced on campus.

Another study conducted on the educational experiences of gifted Muslim female high-school students in Canada has highlighted similar challenges experienced by all three Muslim women who participated in the study (Stafiej, 2012). According to Stafiej, all three participants highlighted ‘relatively low levels of interactions between students of different cultures’ (p. 87). In addition, these young women manifested disappointment regarding making friends with other non-Muslim students in their high-schools.

Gunel (2007) has also highlighted the interpersonal challenges that many Muslim students have experienced in educational institutions and discussed that most of the Muslim girls participated in the study have reported being generally uncomfortable amongst American students and teachers.

2.1.2 Muslim Female Students, Discrimination, and Teacher’s Low Expectation

Incidences of discrimination are highlighted in other studies (Elnour, 2012; Diab, 2009; Javed, 2011). For example, the findings of a study conducted by Elnour (2012) about the educational and career experiences of immigrant professional Sudanese Muslim women in the United States have revealed the existence of discrimination and prejudice felt by the participants based on their race, gender, religion, and accented English. The study also reveals the negative impacts of such

discrimination on the participants' educational and career experiences. Although discrimination based on religious affiliations was reported by all of the participants, discrimination for those who wore the hijab was harsher. The participants also believed that the hostility that Muslims encountered in the U.S. was heightened in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Another finding of this study, according to Elnour, is that, in contrast to the existing literature about the oppression of black women in the United States, most of the participants did not report any incidence of gender discrimination.

Diab (2009) has also highlighted the existence of discrimination and negative stereotypes in public high-schools in Canada and noted that despite this fact, the participants had reported positive educational experiences. Diab has attributed the positive educational experiences of the participants to wearing the hijab and believed that wearing the hijab has helped Canadian Muslim school girls validate their Muslim identities and perceive Canadian education as an overall pleasant experience. Similarly, Ali (2012) has argued that although most of the Muslim secondary school girls who participated in the study faced certain challenges in their schools, it did not hinder them from constructing overall positive experiences about their public education in Canada. Zine (2001) discussed the issues of hidden curriculum and teachers' and guidance counselors' low expectations of Muslim students, which are constructed based on their misconceptions of Muslim students and their families, as evidences of discrimination that Muslim school girls experience in Canadian public schools.

Javed (2011) explored the experiences of "Muslim Pakistani and Indian students in a New York school system" and highlighted discrimination and negative prejudices against Muslim students perceived by the participants. Additionally, the participants attributed these issues to lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims amongst their peers and teachers, and believed that 'teachers and administrations must learn about Islam and Muslims' (p. 151). Javed also raised the issue of bullying in schools and highlighted the fact that compared to male Muslim students, 'who have been treated somehow normally' (p. 165), the female Muslim students participating in the study had been treated differently and faced more bullying. According to Javed, 'Muslim women reported being victimized through bullying because of wearing the hijab' (p. 166). Negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslim students were also highlighted in

Javed's study. Javed attributed these issues to the lack of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslim students in schools.

Academic discrimination, racism, and religious and cultural hostility in American schools and their negative impacts on the school experiences and identity construction of a group of East African Muslim immigrant youth were highlighted in Basford's (2008) study. According to the researcher, instead of attending regular public schools, these East African Muslim immigrant students preferred to attend specialized schools such as the one presented in the research. The culturally specific charter school presented in Basford's research provided more cultural, religious, and language accommodations for the students, and eliminated the feelings of invisibility and constant attempts for fitting in and belonging that these students experienced in their schools.

The issues of teachers' low expectations of Muslim students and their lack of interest and negative attitudes toward them is highlighted in several studies (Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Mc Cue, 2008). For example, Bagguley and Hussain (2007) explored the reasons behind the increased presence of South Asian women in universities in the U.K., despite the fact that they were amongst the most excluded groups. The findings of this study revealed that a number of white teachers hold negative attitudes towards South Asian students' education. According to the researchers, these teachers often quite openly believed that 'South Asian women's education was going to be a waste of time as they were destined for marriage and motherhood rather than for careers' (p. 35). In addition, a number of the participants mentioned staffs' lack of interest toward South Asian students and highlighted incidences in which 'a few academic staff' (p. 35) had questioned their academic ability. Bagguley and Hussain have argued that since the study was conducted after September 11, some of the participants in the study, especially the Muslim students who wore the hijab, had experienced the backlash.

Bagguley and Hussain's study has also highlighted the continuing barriers that the participants (consisting of 114 young South Asian Muslim women) had faced in getting admission in the university and labour market. Out of these 114 young women, 37 were Indian, 51 were Pakistani, and 26 were Bangladeshi. According to Bagguley and Hussain (2007), even though the number

of South Asian female university students has increased dramatically in the past ten years, these three ethnic groups were different in terms of their involvement in higher education. The findings indicated that Bangladeshi women's participation in higher education had been low but was growing rapidly. Indian women's participation in higher education, on the other hand, had been high but was growing slowly. Finally, Pakistani women's participation in higher education had been moderate but was growing rapidly. In addition, high job aspiration and strong parental support were mentioned by Bangladeshi and Pakistani women as two important factors that contributed to the rapid growth of their involvement in higher education.

Further, Bagguley and Hussain's study (2007) reported the existence of some stereotypes about the 'typical Indian girl' as a domesticated and compliant woman, prevailing among white students and staff. According to Bagguley and Hussain (2007), a number of Muslim participants felt that 'they were constantly correcting white liberal myths about South Asian Muslim women, that they felt at root were both racist and sexist in their failure to appreciate the change and diversity in South Asian communities' (p. 35).

In Australia Mansouri and Kamp (2007) have also discussed teachers' low expectations and lack of interest toward Muslim students and its impact on Muslim students' disengagement from school and learning. This research, which was conducted on Arab-Australian high-school students (male and female) studied Muslim students' educational and social experiences as well as the impacts of racism and exclusion on Muslim students' educational experiences and identities particularly after 9/11. One of the interesting findings of the study is the mention of 'particular instances of racism' (p. 93), by a number of female participants, which they believed were related to wearing the hijab as well as the negative attitudes towards Muslim girls and women.

In addition, Mansouri and Kamp (2007) highlighted the hybrid identity of Arab-Australian youth participating in the study and their ambivalence regarding their hybrid identities. A number of the Lebanese-Australian students who participated in the study were not sure if they could call Australia their true homes 'despite the fact that they may never have lived in Lebanon' (p. 95); they believed that Lebanon is their only home. Several of these students attributed this to the feelings of exclusion and racism that they had experienced in Australia. One of the participants

highlighted the impacts of racial identifiers and argued that racial identifiers are usually used to differentiate and exclude ethnic minority groups from a dominant, mono-culturally defined Australian identity.

Similarly, in an extensive study of 110 Muslim women in 5 different states in Australia, Mc Cue (2008) argued that most of the Muslim students who participated in the study had faced some barriers in actively participating in their schools. However, many of them had positive experiences at school. These barriers included discrimination based on the religious dress and teachers' and career advisors' 'lack of interest and even discrimination toward Muslim women's higher education aspirations in some state schools' (p. 5).

Mc Cue (2008) has also highlighted Muslim women's desire to pursue higher education and identified key incentives as having 'strong personal desire for higher education, strong family and community support, and the overall multicultural university environment' (p. 6). Other incentives included improved accommodations for Muslim women such as provision of prayer rooms, and halal foods. Further, the study discussed barriers to Muslim women's active participation in higher education such as 'active discouragement' of Muslim girls' participation in higher education in some state schools, and 'family opposition, in some ethnic groups' (p. 6).

Mc Cue (2008) indicated that in addition to higher education, Muslim students have participated actively in the workforce. The key drivers for this active participation included Muslim women's strong personal desire to participate in non-Muslim community and open expressions of their Muslim identity in Australian society. Other drivers included Muslim women's improved self-confidence and improved workplace culture to respect Muslim women's hijab. Overt racial and religious discrimination, stereotyping and discrimination based on the religious dress and language skills, especially for newcomers, have, nonetheless, been identified as barriers to workforce participation by Muslim women.

2.1. 3 Muslim Female Students and Parental Support

Parental support for Muslim female students to continue higher education has been identified by several studies conducted in the U.K. (Abbas, 2003; Ahmad, 2001, 2009; Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006). For example, the findings of a study by Abbas (2003), which examined the impacts of

domestic religio-cultural norms and values on the educational attitudes and experiences of young South Asian women, have highlighted the existence of parental support for the Muslim women participating in the study. Therefore, as Abbas asserted, Muslim parents have actively encouraged their daughters to continue their higher education. In addition, Abbas found a strong bond between South Asian women and Islam. Considering that these women were from working class families, Abbas argued that this bonding can contribute to further marginalize South Asian Muslim women in the context of education. Further, Abbas pointed to ‘certain negative religio-cultural norms and values’, and ‘the negative culturally defined interpretation of Islam’ (p. 424) as likely to negatively affect different aspects of South Asian Muslim women’s education, particularly those with lower social class profiles.

Parental support is also highlighted in another study by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006). The study is entitled “Muslim women and Higher Education: Identities, Experiences and Prospects” and has explored Muslim women Students’ experiences of higher education, equal opportunities, and graduate employability in the U.K. In this study, 105 Muslim women from universities in Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford, Birmingham, and London were interviewed. The majority of respondents were undergraduate students from South Asian (Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi), African, African-Caribbean, and Arab ethnicities. Graduate students or those in employment constituted a small proportion of the respondents.

Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) stated that the participants talked about their parents as their most important sources of motivation and encouragement for pursuing higher education, and believed that this finding is in sharp contrast to the prevailing stereotypes about oppressive Muslim families which claim that they do not allow their daughters to pursue higher education or participate in labor market. In addition, according to the participants, it is important to consider the diversity of Muslim women and the fact that there is not a single way to categorize them or their experiences.

The participants in this study were also aware of the empowering quality of university education in their lives and the fact that it could enhance their marital prospects and choices. According to Tyrer and Ahmad (2006), this finding is also in contrast to the stereotypes about the popularity of arranged marriages in Muslim families, and is consistent with the findings of Equal

Opportunities Commission's (EOC) survey in 2006. According to this survey, which was conducted on 1200 Grade-11 students mostly Muslim women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, about 90% strongly believed that they had the support of their parents for continuing education and pursuing career aspirations. These women also indicated that their parents did not expect them to get married or have children.

Other findings from Tyrer and Ahmad's (2006) study suggest that Muslim women's experiences of higher education were extremely diverse, and their experiences ranged from good to bad. According to Tyrer and Ahmad, the good experiences were reported by participants who had been included more, while the bad experiences were reported by participants who had experienced racism. In addition, the findings identified "racism" as a persistent factor in higher educational system and indicated that racism manifests itself in a wide spectrum ranging from 'far-right white racist activities' (p. 17), to more subtle forms of 'institutionalized discrimination and favoritism' (p. 18). Another aspect of the university life mentioned by the respondents was their experiences of Islamophobia. While Islamophobia was explained by the respondents in gender-blind ways, several of the respondents believed that men and women experience Islamophobia differently. They believed that Muslim women who practice veiling were more vulnerable to gender and racial stereotypes as the practice of veiling can mark Muslim women as 'alien, non-liberal, or oppressed in the eyes of racists' (p. 19). Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) also mentioned that, despite the participants identifying racism and gender discrimination as the most important labor market barriers, they held extremely positive attitudes towards finding a job.

Ahmad (2001, 2007, 2009) conducted several studies on undergraduate and postgraduate Muslim female university students in the U.K. in order to explore their experiences of higher education. Ahmad has also highlighted parental support for Muslim female students to continue their higher education (see Ahmad, 2001, 2009). In contrast to the stereotypical attitudes toward Muslim families, which presume that they block their daughters' entrance to universities, Ahmad's studies (2001, 2009) have highlighted the positive attitudes of Muslim parents, in particular the fathers, toward their daughters' higher education. Therefore, Ahmad (2001) pointed out that 'given the supportive and encouraging role some Muslim parents play in assisting in their daughters' achievements, the category 'Muslim family' also needs redefinition' (p. 149).

Despite the positive support that Muslim female university students receive from their parents to pursue their higher education, Ahmad (2009) has argued that these students often feel “Othered” in their universities. In addition, by highlighting the findings of her studies, Ahmad (2009) has challenged the prevailing stereotypes about female educated Muslims as rebels to their cultures and concluded that ‘Muslim female students play an active role in the construction and reconstruction of their social and personal identities within and despite patriarchal structures in both public and private domains’ (Ahmad, 2001, p. 149).

Ahmad (2007), has also explored the perceived and actual higher education experiences of British South Asian Muslim women, and examined the way these experiences impact the identity construction among Muslim women. Here again, Ahmad highlights ways in which the women actively challenged the prevailing stereotypes that misrepresent educated Muslim women as ‘religious and cultural rebels’ (p. 46). In other words, Ahmad’s study has demonstrated that Muslim women’s voices disrupt hegemonic discourses of Muslim women as a category of analysis and discourse. According to Ahmad, ‘it also questions the legitimacy of deterministic and racist binarized discursive formations’ (p. 47). Another important finding of the study is the sense of Othering amongst Muslim women students. Ahmad (2007) noted that ‘while instances of anti-Muslim racism were rare or subtle, certain university structures and expectations of what being a mainstream student means often contributed to a noted sense of Othering’ (p. 46).

The role of family and culture in shaping the educational experiences of minority students has been highlighted in a study by Shavarini (2001), who studied the educational experiences of Iranian Muslims, Jews, Bahais, and Armenians undergraduate students in the U.S. Shavarini identified three central factors in the educational experiences of these students including family, culture, and a motivation to achieve high socioeconomic status, and argued that there is a parenting style amongst the families of these students that is based on mutual respect when it comes to educational decision making in the family. The families of the participants also viewed academic degrees as a social signal of achievement, and as a means to attain socioeconomic success.

2.1.4 Muslim Female Students, Anti-Muslim Sentiments, and Lack of Accommodation

Several studies have highlighted anti-Muslim sentiments (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Speck, 1997; McDermott-Levy, 2010, 2011) and lack of accommodation for practicing Muslim students in American universities (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013) as well as in American high school campuses (Azimi, 2011; Hanson, 2009).

Concentrating on the central role that religion plays in students' identities, in their study, Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) called for college administrators' sensitivity to this important aspect of Muslim students' identities in order to create more welcoming learning environments for them. In the study, the researchers highlighted lack of accommodation for Muslim students and provided several suggestions to build a more identity-safe environment for Muslim students in university campuses including:

access to physical spaces that facilitate the practice of Islam without ridicule or judgment (for instance, having a private place to pray and wash up for prayer) and access to halal meals (foods that do not contain pork and for which meats are slaughtered in a particular way) and the accommodation of the special meal times (before sunrise and after sundown) during the month of Ramadan³ (p. 27).

Being Muslim female academics themselves, Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) have shared their and other Muslim students' experiences of being Muslims in an academic space in the United States. It should be noted that the sample of this study was not been limited to Muslim female students but also included male Muslim students and Muslim students from different ethnicities. Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) highlighted Muslim students' 'experiences of prejudice (at worst) or lack of understanding (at best) on the part of the professors' (p. 25) and the way they could negatively affect the students' academic performance. In addition, all of the participants in this study reported that they constantly thought that other people judged them based on negative

³ According to Oxford Dictionary, Ramadan is 'the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset'.

stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, such as ‘Muslim terrorist and oppressed Muslim women’ (p. 25). Therefore, according to Nasir and Al-Amin, Muslim students who participated in this study had to constantly correct and manage other peoples’ impressions of them. Nasir and Al-Amin referred to this process as ‘identity management process’ (p. 25) which, according to them, could negatively affect Muslim students’ academic achievement. The time and energy that the students used for this process could have been devoted to their studies at the university. For example, one of the two veiled Muslim student whose story was explained in this research reported her concerns about the way she was perceived by other people on campus based on the prevailing stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed. In addition, since practicing Islam can make Muslim students highly visible, the researchers observed that Muslim students felt under pressure mostly ‘in moments of practicing Islam such as praying while on campus’ (p. 25). Similarly, several participants in another study (Sheikh, 2009), conducted on Muslim students attending public schools in the U.S., highlighted the challenges associated with adherence to Islamic beliefs and practicing Islam in public schools in the aftermath of September 11.

Similar to Nasir and Al-Amin (2006), Ali and Bagheri (2009) have also discussed a lack of accommodation for Islamic practices of Muslim students (such as daily praying and fasting during Ramadan) in university campuses. Ali and Bagheri believed that ‘student affairs practitioners can assist Muslim students in overcoming barriers to spiritual exploration and religious adherence in many ways’ (p. 51). These researchers provided some practical suggestions for meeting Muslim students’ religious needs in university campuses and improving campus climate. These included (1) creating safe spaces for daily prayers by Muslim students; (2) including Islamic religious holidays on the academic calendar; (3) food accommodations for Muslim students such as providing halal food (In Islam only foods that are prepared from halal meat are permitted to eat) and setting up alcohol-free social events; and finally (4) providing educational opportunities and panel discussions for non-Muslim students to get familiar with the hijab and correct their misconceptions. Ali and Bagheri have highlighted the role of education in improving non-Muslims’ knowledge about Islamic practices, such as the hijab. They also discussed that since there is not enough knowledge about the hijab, Muslim students who wear the hijab ‘may look different depending on their nationality and culture’ (p. 51). Therefore, Ali and Bagheri argued that improving non-Muslim students’ awareness about the role of women in Islam and the hijab is crucial in improving campus climate.

Azimi (2011) has also highlighted the lack of accommodation for religious practices of Muslim female high-school students in the U.S. Azimi noted that despite these students' marginalization within the American educational system, they managed to successfully graduate from high-school and attend university. Similarly, Hanson (2009) pointed to the lack of accommodation for Muslim high school girls in America as one of the findings of her study. In addition, Hanson identified a lack of knowledge about Muslims and Islam in American high-schools as another important finding of the study.

Focusing on the challenges of Muslim female undergraduate students who wear the hijab on the university campus, Seggie and Sanford (2010) conducted a qualitative case study research in a predominately Christian four-year research university. Consistent with the literature discussed above, Seggie and Sanford have also highlighted the lack of accommodation for practicing Muslim students and provided a number of practical suggestions for effectively accommodating Muslim students by university administration. These included acknowledging Islamic holidays, providing quiet zones for Muslim students to pray, building gender-specific residence halls, hiring religiously-diverse faculty members, and setting up awareness-raising activities in the university. In the study, the researchers tried to explore female Muslim international and American students' perceptions of the campus religious climate. The findings of the study revealed both negative and positive perceptions about campus religious climate. The findings also indicated the existence of 'some minor instances of marginalization, prejudice and discomfort' (p. 76). Further, the findings showed that although veiled female Muslim students experience a rather welcoming campus, 'they still experience feelings of mild exclusion and marginalization' (p. 59). Another important finding of the study was Muslim students' preference to socialize and befriend their own religious group.

Stubbs and Sallee (2013) identified three important challenges that Muslim students face in American universities. These included 'lack of accommodation for religious practices, social expectations that conflict with Islamic values and behavior, and incidences of discrimination and prejudice in and out of the classroom' (p. 463).

Using bicultural acculturation as a theoretical frame, the researchers elaborated on the ways in which Muslim students were able to view themselves as both Muslims and Americans

simultaneously and use bicultural acculturation strategies to manage the prejudice and cope with the situation. They have also pointed to the lack of accommodations for religious practices of Muslim students in the university. However, the findings of the study indicated that Muslim students did not expect any accommodation for their religious needs from their peers and university. Instead, they felt personal responsibility to find ways to fit into the university and its values. Stubbs and Sallee explained that ‘rather than rejecting the mainstream culture as oppressive and intolerant, participants tended to accept personal responsibility for their university experience and for fulfilling Islamic expectations’ (p. 464). According to the researchers, this is because Muslim students acquired ‘dual, parallel identities’ (p. 464), which were more inclined to an American identity and used an acculturation strategy, which was more similar to assimilation. Therefore, instead of expecting accommodation from the university, they felt more responsible to find ways to fit into the university and American value system.

Studying the lived experiences of female Arab-Muslim nursing students in the U.S., McDermott-Levy (2011) highlighted the lack of structural and environmental support for Muslim women to practice Islam while at the university. These included the lack of private facilities for praying and washing before each prayer as well as unavailability of halal food for Muslim students. Another important finding of the study is the experiences of anti-Muslim sentiments amongst the participants (see also McDermott-Levy, 2010). Some of the participants in the study blamed American media for projecting a distorted picture of Muslims and Arabs. Participants who wore the hijab believed that although Americans try not to pay much attention to what other people do, in some instances, they have paid more negative attention to Muslim women who wear the hijab.

Anti-Muslim sentiments are also highlighted by Ali and Bagheri (2009). These researchers believe that hate crimes in America have intensified after September 11, 2001. They note that Muslim students on college campuses have been the primary targets of hate crimes. In addition, they argue that hate crimes are only one way to manifest anti-Muslim sentiments in universities. According to them, students’ class participations sometimes manifest the more subtle forms of anti-Muslim sentiments and discrimination toward Muslim students.

Similarly, Speck (1997) explored the experiences of Muslim American college students. The study revealed anti-Islamic sentiments in university classes. According to Speck, if class

discussions are not monitored and closely controlled by professors, they could turn into a tool to ridicule and discriminate Muslim students. In addition, Speck argued that since Muslim students view professors as an authority figure, they feel hesitant to correct them. Further, Speck demonstrated that the educational experiences of Muslim students in colleges could be adversely affected by cultural differences and religious-based prejudices of professors and peers. Another finding of the study was the misrepresentations of Muslim women, particularly those who wore the veil, as docile, oppressed, and lacking strong English language skills. One of the veiled participants in this study argued that her professors confused her dress with her lack of mastery of English. She believed that her professors automatically thought that because she wore the hijab, she must have had weak English; this participant concluded that based on this stereotype, her professors did not wish to talk to her.

2.1.5 Muslim Female Students and Sense of Belonging

Struggles to achieve a sense of belonging amongst Muslim students is highlighted by other studies (for example, see Asmar et al., 2004; Mir, 2009a). For example, the findings of a national study of female and male Muslim students in Australian universities conducted by Asmar et al., (2004) show that although Muslim students show strong academic satisfaction and commitment, they might experience a diminishing sense of belonging at both institutional and interpersonal levels. The findings have also indicated that in general, gender differences are not significant among the participants. However, in two specific instances, the differences between males' and females' responses were statistically significant. These included questions of (1) whether they felt valuable in the university and (2) whether they felt comfortable in their interactions with non-Muslim students in their courses. The findings of the study indicated that in both cases, Muslim female students were significantly less likely to give positive answers to these questions than Muslim male students. Asmar et al., have concluded that although practicing Muslim students could at times benefit from their faith and its support, their opportunities for personal interaction can be inhibited by their faith. In addition, the findings have indicated that a number of the participants, especially those wearing the hijab, felt excluded and alienated from the campus drinking culture.

Focusing on the issues of identity and campus climate, Mir (2009a) provides a detailed analysis of personal and school-based experiences of three female Muslim university students in the U.S.

The narratives of these Muslim students have highlighted different circumstances that could put minority students' identities at risk. To better explain this risk, Mir (2009a) has argued that 'Muslim students, like other minority groups, must join in the white-monitored development of the 'proper' body politic, which in mainstream neoliberal circles entails white-majority-with-white-influenced-minorities' (p. 131).

According to Mir (2009a), Muslim students' struggle with racism and preserving their identities is amongst the most important challenges that they have faced in American universities. Another important challenge of Muslim students, according to Mir, is gaining a sense of belonging within American universities. As Mir has argued, 'Muslim students may struggle and flounder in working towards a sense of belonging and community via dominant majority social networks' (p. 129).

2.1.6 Muslim Female Students and Negative Stereotypes

The negative reductive stereotypes about Muslim students that construct a distorted image of them are highlighted in several studies (Azimi, 2011; Basit, 1996, 1997; Cohen & Peery, 2006; Jandali, 2012; Muhtaseb, 2007; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 1999; Shaikley, 2006; Siann & Clark, 1992). For example, Shaikley (2006) studied the experiences of a group of Muslim female students, who graduated from an Islamic high-school. Shaikley concluded that for many of the participants, the challenges associated with facing the negative stereotypes and prejudices about Muslim female school girls was amongst the main social challenges faced by these students.

In an autobiographical study, Muhtaseb (2007) reflected on her own experiences as a female faculty of color, who wears the hijab. In the study, she highlighted the role of stereotypes in constructing knowledge about minority groups and discussed ways in which the stereotypes affected the perceptions of her students about her as a veiled female faculty of color. She argued that compared to her white, male counterparts, she had to work much harder to attain the same level of achievement as them. By referring to Omi and Winant (1986), Muhtaseb emphasized considering all of the possible angles of people's identities and their impacts on their experiences and argued that 'we should therefore analyze race as a system in conjunction with other social factors such as class, gender, nationality, and so forth' (p. 26).

A study conducted by Cohen and Peery (2006) highlighted a number of negative reductive stereotypes that portray a distorted image of Muslim women. These researchers elaborated on their teaching experiences in which they provided non-Muslim students with information about Muslim women and their lives by using different genres, such as short stories, essays, graphic novels, and films. Cohen and Peery demonstrate how this literature has helped most students correct their misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslim women and conclude that after studying various texts about Muslim women, 'most students' perceptions became more fair and realistic' (p. 20).

Similarly, Azimi (2011) has discussed teachers', administrators', and fellow students' stereotypical attitudes toward Muslim female students in a study in California public high-school campuses. In another study, Gregory (2014) studied the adaptation strategies amongst a group of Muslim female international college students in the U.S. Gregory reported that the participants actively challenged the prevailing negative stereotypes about Muslim communities.

In England, the stereotypical attitudes of school counselors about Muslim female students and their families are highlighted by Siann and Clark (1992). The researchers argue that the stereotypical views about Muslim female students as not interested in pursuing higher education and career opportunities has nothing to do with the reality of their lives. They also state that there is no evidence supporting the prevailing stereotype about Muslim families as parents who block their daughters' entry into higher education and workplace.

The issues of teachers' and students' negative stereotypes about Muslim students and Islamophobia in public schools, and challenges that veiled Muslim students face in educational settings are highlighted in a study by Jandali (2012). The study discusses the challenges that many Muslim students face in public schools after 9/11 and introduces the Islamic networks group (ING) as an organization which enables Muslim speakers to deliver useful presentations for middle and high-school students in addressing the issues of Islamophobia and harassments of Muslim students in schools.

Studying the issues of Muslim students in the Ontario educational system, Rezai-Rashti (1994) discussed the reductive stereotypes about Muslims school girls in Ontario schools, which according to her are 'reminiscent of the long-gone colonial era' (p. 37). She argued that:

In dealing with teachers, students, and administrations, I find their interactions with Muslim students to be based largely on stereotypes of Muslims that are reminiscent of the long-gone colonial era. For example, Muslim girls who wear the veil are considered automatically passive and oppressed (p. 37).

In addition, Rezai-Rashti (1999) discusses the essentialist thinking of a number of teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors about racial and ethnic minority students, specially veiled Muslim students and argues that within Canadian schools, veiled Muslim students are 'automatically' (p. 51) perceived as oppressed and forced by their oppressive families to wear the hijab. Rezai-Rashti also demonstrates how some of the students took advantage of their teachers' stereotypical attitudes towards Muslim families and used them as excuses for their lack of interest to study mathematics. Further, Rezai-Rashti explains the passive role of school counselors in this regard and states that 'guidance counselors dealing with Muslim girls take their stories about their repressive parents at face value without even bothering to corroborate the students' claims with the parents themselves' (p. 51). Rezai-Rashti (2005) argues that educators who convey a message to racial and ethnic minority students to abandon their backward culture and assimilate with western's way of life should be challenged. Rezai-Rashti (1997) also explains the discriminatory behavior that a group of Somali Muslim school girls had experienced from their teachers' and peers' in one Canadian school.

In addition, Rezai-Rashti (1999) critiques multiculturalism and anti-racism policy as being unable to effectively address the daily challenges of Muslim students in schools. According to Rezai-Rashti (1999),

In multiculturalist policies, the naturalization of the western hegemonic culture continues, while the minority culture become reified and differentiated from normative human behavior (p. 56).

Rezai-Rashti (1999) argues that like multiculturalism, antiracism policy holds an essentialist notion of culture and identity as being homogeneous, fixed, and stable. Thus, she emphasizes the need to move beyond the fixed and simplistic notions of race, gender, identity, religion, and culture in education (see also Rezai-Rashti, 2005).

The stereotypical attitudes of teachers towards their Muslim female students are also highlighted in other studies conducted in the U.K. (for example, Basit, 1996, 1997). These stereotypical attitudes included different issues such as the attendance rate of British Muslim school girls (Basit, 1997). According to Basit, some teachers claimed that British Muslim school girls usually have extended absence from school while visiting their country of origin. The misinterpretations of many British teachers about Muslim religio-cultural values and their stereotypical images of the oppressive Muslim families were also discussed by Basit (1997). According to Basit, these teachers believed that Muslim families made their daughters suffer, just ‘because of their gender’ (p. 436). Another study by Basit, (1996) has indicated that a number of British teachers believed that their Muslim female students usually had low self-esteem; they also believed that Muslim students’ families had low educational expectations of them.

In a book entitled “Educating Muslim girls: Shifting discourses”, Haw et al. (1998) employed a theoretical perspective informed by poststructuralism and feminism to demonstrate the educational experiences of Muslim girls from Pakistani heritage. The authors discussed Muslim students’ relationships with their mostly white and non-Muslim teachers in two single sex schools in the U.K. In addition, throughout the book, the interrelationship of the discourses of race and gender was highlighted, as well as the analysis of the issues of equality and difference. Further, Haw et al. provided an analysis of the diversity that exists amongst the members of minority groups, and the differences between majority and minority groups which shape feminist discourses in education.

2.1.7 Muslim Female Students and the Construction of Religious Identity

Zine (2000, 2001, 2003, 2006a, 2007) has highlighted the issue of religious identity and the cultural challenges related to maintaining an Islamic identity amongst Muslim students. In addition, by referring to Barth (1969) and Khan (2000), she (Zine, 2001) has discussed the way ‘ethnic or religious group boundaries’ (p. 403) are maintained amongst minority groups through notions of inclusion, exclusion, accommodation, and resistance. In addition, she has identified ‘role performance’ (p. 403) as an important factor to determine group membership. Zine (2001) and Khan (2000) have discussed religious practices such as fasting, or prayer on Fridays, as a means to determine the group identity amongst Muslim community. However, Zine believes that

‘group boundaries, the nature of identity, and cultural practices are not static’ (p. 403), but they are constantly in the process of contestation and change.

In her studies, Zine has repeatedly emphasized that despite the social pressure of conformity, Muslim female students are able to negotiate their religious identities while studying in high school. For example, focusing on ethnographic accounts of veiling among Muslim girls who attended a gender-segregated Islamic high-school in Toronto, Zine (2006a) examined the ways that gendered religious identities were constructed in the schooling experiences of youth Muslim women. In this study, Zine (2006a) explored ethno-religious oppression that Muslim girls in Canada faced, and concluded that ‘Muslim girls were consciously and actively challenging some of the stereotypes that governed the way their identities were presented’ (p. 249).

Zine (2001) has also highlighted peer pressure, racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia that Muslim students face in Canadian school system. This study is conducted on ‘high school girls, recent graduates, and university students who were able to bring a mature reflection upon their previous high school experiences’ (p. 400). It examined the ways in which religious identification of Muslim youth is connected to racial and gendered oppression. Zine has analyzed ways in which this could affect Muslim youth’s experiences of schooling while they struggle to maintain their Islamic identification. She has argued that ‘this is important to our understanding of how religion is connected to other sites of social difference, such as race, gender, and linguistic difference and how these variously implicate the way schooling is experienced for minoritized youth’ (p. 419). However, according to Zine, many Muslim students participated in her study ‘were able to resist the social pressure of conformity and maintain an openly Islamic life style while in high school’ (p. 401).

Another study on Muslim girls (Zine, 2000) also indicated that Muslim girls were able to negotiate their religious identities. They also used their identities as a means of resistance to counteract their marginality within secular Eurocentric schools. Similarly, Watt (2011b), pointed to Islamophobia as one of the obstacles identified by Canadian Muslim students in their high-schools and discussed that Canadian Muslim school girls negotiate their identities by creating Muslim spaces within their high schools and wearing the hijab to assert their Muslim identities.

In addition, Zine (2007) highlighted the hijab as a feminist gesture against Muslim women's body objectification (see also Hoodfar, 2003, Macdonald, 2006).

The impact of negative attitudes toward Muslim students on their educational success has been examined in another study (Zine, 2003). In this study, Zine referred to some of the teachers' and guidance counselors' negative perceptions towards racialized students and concluded that these negative attitudes, based on false stereotypes, often lead to a presumption of students' educational failure. In addition, she pointed to some of the false stereotypes about racialized students, such as the presumption that Islam does not value education for girls. She also highlighted the foundations of anti-Islamophobia education and summarized it in five different strategies: (1) reclaiming the stage, (2) understanding diversity in the Islamic tradition, (3) understanding the politics of marginalized religious identities, (4) challenging institutionalized Islamophobia, and (5) deconstructing the politics of representation. It should be noted that like Rezai-Rashti (2005), Zine (2003) has also been critical of liberal multicultural approaches, and believes that they are unable to construct a critical knowledge of power relations in society. According to Zine:

Liberal multicultural approaches to diversity can therefore mask inequality under the guise of superficial cultural pluralism. More critical approaches to inclusive schooling instead advocate for a 'multicentric' approach where marginalized knowledge, histories, and experiences are not simply an 'add-on' to an otherwise Eurocentric curriculum, but rather are part of a plural center where multiple ways of knowing and making sense of the world are the basis for teaching and learning (p. 2).

2.1.8 Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences in Canada

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, there are only a few Canadian studies that, similar to my study, have focused on Muslim female students in the context of higher education (Abukhattala, 2004; Aslam, 2011; Hamdan, 2006; Hojati, 2011; Keshavjee, 2004). Some of these studies, however, did not specifically focus on Muslim female students and included Muslim men as well (see Abukhattala, 2004). A few other studies that have concentrated specifically on Muslim women did not analyze Muslim women's experiences of higher education in Canada and focused on other factors (see Hamdan, 2006; Keshavjee's, 2004). For example, Abukhattala

(2004) has explored the educational and cultural adjustment of Arab Muslim university students (including male and female) in Canada. The study highlighted the existence of negative attitudes and stereotypes about Muslim students amongst non-Muslim peers. It also discussed the hijab as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression in Canada and the challenges regarding wearing the hijab in Canadian universities.

Similarly, there is another Canadian study which, although it focused on Muslim women, it did not explore their educational experiences in Canadian universities (see Keshavjee, 2004). Instead, the focus of Keshavjee's study was the role that higher education plays in changing Muslim women's lives. Keshavjee noted that the participants' higher education and their professional status strongly affected their social roles in society. The study also indicated that the active social role of the participants directly challenged the process of knowledge production of Muslim women, the exact same process that stereotyped them in Western societies. Similarly, the study conducted by Hamdan (2006) concentrated on Muslim women in the context of higher education in Canada. The focus of this study, however, was Arab Muslim women's views about their gender roles and their self-perceptions as women after attending and completing university education in Canada.

Studies by Aslam (2011) and Hojati (2011) are the only ones I found about the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities. This clearly reveals the gap in the literature and indicates a dearth of knowledge about Muslim female students and their experiences of higher education in Canada. Aslam concentrated on different areas such as identity formation, understanding of culture and religion, family influences on education and career aspiration, and overall experiences of Muslim Pakistani-Canadian students in her study. The study highlighted ways in which Muslim Pakistani-Canadians' cultural and/or religious norms shape their educational and career aspiration and overall decision-making. In addition, to provide a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students, the study provided practical implications for campus services.

In her study Hojati (2011) examined the challenges that Muslim Iranian female students face in their graduate schools and in their work place. She found that, highly educated immigrant Iranian women who have tried to escape from an 'oppressive' regime in Iran hoping to find a 'safe' and

'just' society in Canada and to pursue further education face new forms of oppression in Canada. The findings of this study indicated that after the tragic terrorist attacks on World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, Iranian Muslim women in Canada have experienced even more complicated challenges. Another important finding of this study was that although these women suffer in Canadian graduate schools and society at large, they do not wish to return to Iran because of the socio-political environment of that country.

As discussed in this section and in view of the fact that there are limited research about Canadian Muslim female university students and their educational experiences, I strove to bridge this gap and provide a nuanced analysis of the overall experiences of Muslim female university students in Canada to further knowledge about what it means to be a Muslim woman living and educating in Canadian society.

2.1.9 Minority Students and College Atmosphere

In addition to the researches that have focused specifically on Muslim women and education, including higher education, a number of studies have examined racial and ethnic climate of campuses and its impact on minority students' academic achievement. For example, a number of studies have demonstrated that institutionalized satisfaction of minority students can affect their academic success (see Jenkins, 2001; Montelongo, 2003; Tinto, 1997). The effects of a hostile climate on female graduate students is highlighted by Walraven (1995), who studied four areas that were believed to contribute to a hostile environment for female graduate students. These areas included self-concept of ability, support factors, climate factors (discrimination/sexual harassment), and family and dependants. Amongst these four areas, only, self-concept of ability and the experience of sexual harassment were strongly supported by the findings.

The impact of campus climate on racially and ethnically underrepresented students is also highlighted in other studies (Cabrera et al., 1999; Edirisooriya & McLean, 2003; Morrow et al., 2000). These studies indicated that in several cases, minority students reported that they were subjects of prejudiced attitudes of faculty and administrators. In addition, participants in a number of studies reported incidents of discrimination in their campuses (see Johnson, 2003; Solorzano et al., 2000), or racial and ethnic harassment and violence (see Brown, 2009; Ehrlich, 1990; Farrell & Jones, 1988). In his study on college campuses, Hartley (2004) highlighted the

hostile nature of college campuses toward religious and spiritual practices. By explaining the ways academic colonialism is deeply embedded within the higher education system, Hurtado (1996) documented and outlined the way this institutional context can affect students in higher education. In addition, Hurtado et al., (1999) advocated for improving the climate for racial and ethnic diversity in university campuses. Because racial and ethnic diversity in university campuses can positively affect students' learning, Hurtado et al., (1999) notes that 'providing opportunities for quality interaction and an overall climate of support results not only in a better racial climate but also in important learning outcomes for students' (p. 3).

The findings of a study on "social support and college adjustment among Muslim American women" indicated that their college adjustment is significantly associated with perceived social support (Karandish, 2014).

On the other hand, other studies have demonstrated the positive effects of a welcoming environment on students. For example, in his study on secondary school students, El-Haj (2007) demonstrated how these students could be positively influenced when they perceive the environment to be supportive and welcoming. In addition, some other studies examined the relationship between campus climate and students' self-esteem (Tinto, 1993; Watson et al., 2002), and highlighted the importance of a supportive campus climate that allows all students to get involved and to participate.

I believe that paying attention to the findings of the studies discussed in this section, including those that have concentrated on the effects of college atmosphere on the educational experiences of minority students, is insightful and important for my research. This is because they can reveal some of the challenges that Muslim female students experience in Canadian universities. Therefore, the findings of these studies have practical implications for my research, and should not be overlooked.

In this section, I have discussed the existing literature about the educational experiences of Muslim women in Canada and other parts of the world. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, there is abundance of literature demystifying Muslim female students' experiences of discrimination, racism, and negative prejudices and stereotypes in higher educational institutions in different parts of the world. However, there are only a few studies on the educational

experiences of Canadian Muslim female university students. While my research is an attempt to fill the gap in the literature and to shed light into the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities, it has other intentions as well.

In other words, Canada claims to be a multicultural society that advocate and support equality for members of Canadian society with different gendered, racial, ethnic, religious profiles. Hence, I was curious to explore if the experiences of Muslim female students in Canada manifest any resemblance to the experiences of Muslim female students in other parts of the world or not. I was also interested to explore Muslim female students' reactions toward the stereotypes which homogenize them based on their religion and find out if they challenge or accept them. In addition, I wanted to examine if the stereotypes have had any impact on Muslim students' interactions with the majority non-Muslim white students in their universities. What distinguishes my research from the literature discussed in this section is the centrality of Muslim female students' agencies and my attention to the ways in which they might resist the negative stereotypes and deal with all the negativities surrounding them. The following section, will discuss the studies that have been conducted on Muslim women in general.

2.2 Muslim Women in Diaspora

There is extensive literature exploring the challenges that Diasporic Muslim women face in western societies in general. Under the general umbrella of Muslim women, one can identify studies with different points of entry with regards to the challenges faced by Muslim women in Diaspora.

These studies include Muslim women and the veil (for example, see Alvi, 2013; Alvi et al., 2003; Bullock, 2000, 2002; Hoodfar, 1993, 2003; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Ruby, 2006; Siraj, 2011), Muslim women, labor market, and workplace discrimination (for example, see Syed & Pio, 2010; Parker-Jenkins et al., 1999), Muslim women and popular media (for example, see Bilge, 2010; Honarbin-Holiday, 2013; Khan, 2014; Sensoy & Marshal, 2010; Watt, 2011a), and Muslim women and (re)construction of their identities (for example, see Keddie, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Khan, 1995a, 2000, 2002; Mirza, 2013; Sirin & Fine, 2008). The following subsections provide detailed discussions about these studies.

2.2.1 Muslim Women and the Veil

This section deals specifically with studies on Muslim women and the veil. By providing nuanced analyses of Muslim women's experiences of the veil, several studies (Hoodfar, 1993, 2003; McDonough, 2003, Ruby, 2006) have challenged the colonialist construction of veiled Muslim women as oppressed and subjugated by Islamic patriarchy. As such, these studies have highlighted the significance of women's resistance and agency by calling into question the one-dimensional treatment of veiling as a symbol of Islamic oppression.

Hoodfar (2003) has suggested examining veiling in a broader framework that considers individual freedom of choice. In her opinion, considering such a framework enables one to view a veiled Muslim woman as an active agent, rather than a passive subject. In fact, in her study, Hoodfar has demonstrated the voluntary nature of the veiling practice, as well as its multiple meanings from the perspectives of Muslim women who have voiced their narratives in the study. Abu-Lughod (1998) discusses the practice of veiling amongst many young Muslim women in the Middle East and believes that this current amongst these women is as much a symbols of modernity as the upper- and middle-class Muslim women who took off their veil in the name of modernity about a century ago. In addition, Hoodfar has highlighted the Oriental and colonial images of veiled Muslim women in western societies and emphasized the need to seriously take into account the lived experiences of Muslim women. She has discussed the veil as a 'complex, dynamic, and changing cultural practice' (p. 15) and argued that:

The assumption that veiling is a static practice which symbolizes the oppressive nature of patriarchy in Muslim societies has prevented social scientists and western feminists from examining Muslim women's own accounts of their lives, hence perpetuating the racist stereotypes which are ultimately in the service of patriarchy in both societies (p. 16)

In this way, Hoodfar (1993, 2003) has highlighted Muslim women's opinions about the hijab and the multiple meanings that they have associated with that. Consistent with Hoodfar there are other studies that have discussed that Muslim women practice veiling for many different personal, historical, cultural, and political reasons (Alvi et al., 2003; Bullock, 2000, 2002; MacDonough, 2003; Macdonald, 2006; Ruby, 2006; Siraj, 2011). As Afshar et al., (2009) argued 'different Muslim women at different times and for different reasons have decided to wear or

discard the hijab' (p. 175). In fact, wearing the hijab 'is a lived experience full of contradiction and multiple meanings' (Alvi et al., 2003, p. XVIII).

In her study of seven veiled Canadian Muslim women McDonough (2003) highlighted the multiple meanings of the hijab identified by the participants in her study. McDonough asserted that the decision of taking up the hijab had been empowering for a number of the participants and 'this is a message that the wider Canadian society needs to hear' (p. 106). She concluded that the hijab had given several of her interviewees a sense of dignity and self-worth. In addition, McDonough's study revealed that wearing the hijab can elicit different negative stereotypes about the wearer. For example, the association of the hijab and inability to speak English is highlighted by one of the participants in this study. The participant referred to an incident that had happened to her in Canada where, people presumed that she could not speak English or French and 'start[ed] gesturing with their hands' (p. 111). According to her:

This taught me a lesson, and from then outward, I am the first one to greet people and start the conversation about something or the other so that they are put at ease that I am a normal human being and not some alien from outer space (p. 111).

Feeling more "respectable" through practicing veiling also emerged as an important theme in Ruby's study (2006). This study examined immigrant Muslim women's perceptions of the hijab, and highlighted the multiple meanings associated with the hijab identified by the participants. The participants in Ruby's study highlighted different positive experiences associated with the practice of the veil. They have highlighted the hijab as a means to confirm their Muslim identity, to control their lives, to earn respect in society, and to exercise modesty. The findings of the study have challenged the dominant conception in western societies of the hijab as a symbol of Muslim women oppression.

Diab (2009) explored the experiences of Muslim girls in Canadian public high-schools and also highlighted some of the positive schooling experiences of the participants. Diab found that although a number of the participants had reported incidents of discrimination and negative stereotypes, they had, nonetheless, positive school experiences, which were partly due to the practice of veiling. According to Diab, the practice of veiling has obviously helped the Muslim girls to validate their Muslim identity.

In contrast to the positive impacts of the practice of veiling on Muslim students found in Ruby and Diab's studies, a number of participants in McDonough's (2003) study found the experience of unveiling to be empowering. According to McDonough, this is because these women viewed the veil as a public symbol of piety. McDonough has argued that, in view of the diversity of Muslim women's perspectives, both choices are valid and understandable since they could best suit women's needs. As McDonough states 'Both situations exist; both are valid for the individual' (p. 106).

Similarly, Ruby (2006) highlighted participants in her study who did not wish to wear the hijab, and argued that by wearing 'modest clothes' even without headscarf and 'not drawing attention to themselves' (p. 65), these women also exercised the practice of the hijab. In addition, Ruby reported experiences of discrimination and racism amongst Canadian veiled Muslim students. Further, by providing some examples, Ruby highlighted the negative attitudes of some of the school officials and teachers in Quebec, Montreal, and Saskatoon towards the hijab. Ruby also discussed the negative impacts of these attitudes on students' self-esteem and believed that despite the claims that Canada is a 'multicultural country' (p. 63), Muslims in Canada are viewed as "Others" and experience many difficulties living in Canada.

Bullock (2002) demonstrated the discrimination that many veiled Muslim women experience in Toronto 'based upon the way they dress' (p. 84). She believed that erasing the voices of Muslim women from the dominant discourses about the meaning of the hijab is similar to excluding women's perspectives and voices from the mainstream discourses, the same factor that has stimulated the emergence of different waves of feminism. To illustrate the need for echoing the voices of Muslim women in any discourse on the practice of veiling, Bullock (2002) referred to Dorothy Smith, who has argued that 'the remedy is to take women's experience into account so that the balance can be achieved and women's perspectives and experiences can be presented equally with men's' (p. 37).

Bullock (2002) also highlighted the oppressive nature of the veil in the eye of many white non-Muslim people. According to Bullock, there are three different approaches to the veil and to the study of veiled Muslim women. She believed that the first approach, which is 'the most simplistic and unsophisticated view of the veil' is 'the pop culture view' (p. xxv). The underlying

assumption of this view of the veil is that Muslim women are oppressed by the Islamic patriarchy, and the veil is a symbol of that. Bullock (2002) also discussed that this view has ‘an unconscious adherence to liberalism and modernization theory’ (p. xxv).

According to Bullock (2002), the second view, which is more sophisticated, is the liberal feminists’ view of the veil. Some of the feminists in this group try to listen to the voices of veiled Muslim women while others do not. Nonetheless, all of these feminists believe in the oppressive nature of the veil.

The third approach to the study of the veil is the ‘contextual approach’ (p. xxvii). According to Bullock (2002), through listening to the voices of Muslim women, this group of feminists tries to understand the meanings associated with the veil from an insider’s point of view. Some of these feminists question the universality of western feminists’ viewpoints and highlight the fact that western feminism is not capable of resolving non-western women’s issues and speak for all women. Bullock identifies herself with this school of feminism and challenges liberal feminists’ viewpoint about the veil as a symbol of Muslim women’s oppression.

Bullock (2002) traced the reasons for contemporary attacks on the veil back to the era of modern colonialism. As Bullock pointed out ‘any argument that advances the notion that the veil is a symbol of Muslim women’s oppression draws, wittingly or unwittingly, from Orientalist and colonial discourses about the veil’ (p. 3).

She believed that the nature of the veil as a gaze inhibitor has played a major role in constructing the contemporary attacks on the veil. Following the work of Timothy Mitchell, Bullock (2002) discussed that the reason can be found in the priority that is given to “looking” in western culture, and in the Europeans’ tendency to see the world as an exhibition. According to Bullock (2002), veiled Muslim women have violated all the requirements of the world-as-exhibition notion, and under this circumstance, the power relation between the superior (the European) and the inferior (the Middle-Eastern) has reversed. This, consequently, has stimulated a strong campaign against the veil. As Bullock (2002) argued:

How could one be superior, or establish authority over creatures who could not be known (because they could not be seen or grasped as a picture)? What could not be seen or grasped as a spectacle could not be controlled (p. 6).

In highlighting Muslim women's voices about the hijab, Bullock (2002) drew attention to a number of the participants in her study, who had found wearing the hijab to be a liberating experience. She explained that this view is consistent with 'the feminist critique of the commodification of women's body in a capitalist society' (p. 72). In addition, several interviewees in Bullock's study stated that while the practice of veiling has been used as a 'men's way of controlling women', nowadays it can be seen as a 'more feminine thing ... expressing yourself' (p. 46).

Ahmed (1992) also provided a careful and detailed analysis of the relationship between the veil and western colonial discourses, as well as an analysis of the historical trajectory of the way the veil has been turned to a strong signifier of the Islamic oppression in some Arab societies. She stated that 'in the discourse of women and the veil another discourse is inscribed, the discourse of colonial domination, the struggle against it and the class divisions around the struggle' (p. 130).

In addition, Ahmed (1992) analyzed how colonial authorities rejected the claims of feminism with respect to themselves, while, at the same time, they captured the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, towards the culture of the 'Other' men. As such, Ahmed argued that with using the language of colonial feminism, the issues of women, their oppression, and the cultures of the 'Other', men have been fused.

Ahmed (2005) amongst other scholars (Hoodfar, 2003; Bullock, 2000, 2002; Macdonald, 2006, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; McDonough, 2003; Zine, 2006a) has highlighted the hijab as a feminist gesture. These scholars have discussed that the veil can assist many Muslim women to divert men's gaze from sexualizing their bodies. The women participated in Hoodfar's (2003) study, which is conducted at the postsecondary education level in Canada, also used feminist arguments in support of their practice of veiling. They believed that Canadian society constantly encourages women to meet some beauty standards and make them preoccupied with achieving those standards, a situation that hinders women from improving their minds and participate fully

in a meaningful social life. According to the participants in Hoodfar's study, the veil can assist women to escape the pressures and improve their minds instead of bodies.

In the U.K., Siraj (2011) highlighted the fluid and changing meanings of the hijab amongst Muslim women in Glasgow, Scotland. The study also emphasized the significance of space and the fact that meanings of the hijab depend on space and the spatial context in which it is exercised 'as veiling practices are deeply enmeshed and embedded in the spatial practices shaped by the local Scottish context' (p. 716). Out of 30 Muslim women participants in this study, 15 wore the hijab and 15 did not. While all of the participants believed in the necessity of Muslim women exercising modesty, those who did not wear the hijab believed that the hijab 'locates and locks women into a submissive and secondary position' (p. 728). Thus, Siraj also discussed the disempowering impacts of the hijab for participants who did not wear the hijab. On the other hand, participants who wore the hijab viewed that as a 'source of empowerment' (p. 728). They also used their hijab as a means of 'protection' (p. 723), to earn 'respect' (p. 723), 'to police male gaze' (p. 728) and 'to demonstrate their obedience to their faith' (p. 728).

Macdonald (2006) also studied Muslim women and the veil. In her study, she discussed 'the residual influence of colonial discourses of veiling and unveiling' (p. 7), and the tendency to perceive 'Islamic veiling as intrinsically incompatible with women's agency in the construction of their identities' (p. 7). In addition, Macdonald highlighted the denial of veiled Muslim women's voices, and pointed out that within the context of 'western-style freedoms and lifestyle choices' (p. 15) the practice of veiling can be perceived as a feminist gesture. Macdonald identified other meanings for the veil such as 'the veil as a form of resistance to western ideology and secularism', 'the veil as a fashion accessory', and 'the veil as evidence of Muslim women's agency and freedom of choice' (p. 15) as they are detected within the voices of Diasporic Muslim women.

Using the veil as a fashion accessory and as a means for Canadian Muslim women to negotiate 'being Muslim' and 'being Canadian' (p. 3) is also highlighted by Alvi (2013) who argues that 'by voguing the veil' the women participants in the study 'are in fact attempting to transform the meaning of the veil as a marker of Canadian identity' (p. 3).

At a secondary school in Ottawa, Alvi (2008) analyzed the way hijabi⁴ youth experienced social activities and discussed that hijabi Muslim girls ‘feel they are leaving high school with a less fulfilling experience than their peers’ (p. 107). Alvi believed that this is partly due to the fact that many social activities offered by the high-schools in Ottawa are incompatible with Islamic beliefs and, therefore, Muslim girls feel excluded.

Drawing on feminist, postcolonial, and queer theories, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008) addressed the pedagogical significance of the practice of veiling and the Muslim subject in the aftermath of September 11. In their study, these researchers examined the pedagogical significance of ‘neo-colonial gaze as a basis for thinking further about what it means to be addressing the politics of gender and racialized difference in schools...’(p. 418). As Martino and Rezai-Rashti argue:

What is needed...is a pedagogical approach to anti-racist education in the aftermath of September 11 that is capable of both attending to the historical specificity of veiling as a basis of interrogating current Orientalist significations of the veil and to engage with the politics of desire, heteronormativity and sexism as they continue to be played out within the context of negotiating the racialized boundaries that demarcate cultural spaces of belonging and otherness (p. 429).

In Canada, the way media coverage of the Quebec debates about the issues of the hijab has reinforced the Orientalist view of the veil as oppressive, was highlighted by Khan (1995b). She demonstrated how racism, sexism, religion, and multiculturalism intersect in Canada, and portrays a homogenous image to construct the category ‘Muslim women’ without any internal conflicts. In addition, Khan was critical of multiculturalism in Canada, arguing that it has erased ethnic and national differences and categorized all Muslim women from different racial groups and different countries under the category ‘Muslim women’.

The act of concealing Muslim identities by giving up the hijab, especially in the aftermath of September 11, has been highlighted in other studies (for example, see Hussain, 2002; Peek,

⁴ Hijab refers to a piece of cloth used by many Muslim women for covering their hair. The concocted word hijabi is used for a woman who wears a headscarf.

2003). Hussain (2002) explored Muslim women's attempts to conceal their identities in the aftermath of September 11. According to this study, the women gave up their veil or exchanged it for a hat, and refused to take leave on religious occasions, in order not to attract people's attention to their religious identities, and the fact that they are Muslim.

Peek (2003) surveyed 68 university undergraduate and postgraduate university students in New York City campuses to explore their overall experiences post September 11, 2001. One of the findings of this study has revealed that a number of veiled Muslim female university students had taken off their hijab post 9/11 against their own will. According to Peek,

These participants discussed their parents wanting them to either start wearing their hijab in a less Muslim way (i.e. instead of letting the headscarf drape around their shoulders and bosom, tying the headscarf back around their heads) or to quit wearing the hijab entirely (p. 276).

Peek also explained that this was very difficult for many of the participants since by so doing they were not able to assert their Muslim identity in campus. According to the study, one of the participants decided to continue wearing the hijab despite her family's wish. This student wore it at school and took it off when going home. Although this student had felt guilty of committing something against her parents' will, that was the only way she was able to assert her Muslim identity.

In view of the fact that religion plays a crucial role in constructing identity, a study by Seggie and Austin (2010) focused on students who wore the hijab in their private life but removed it to attend universities (or concealed it with a wig or hat to appear unveiled). These students had to do this because of headscarf ban policy in Turkish universities, and are referred to by Seggie and Austin (2010) as part-time unveilers. Seggie and Austin examined the impact of headscarf ban policy in the process of identity development amongst 30 undergraduate part-time unveilers in 5 different universities in 4 different cities in Turkey. The findings indicated that the policy had negative impact on the development of 'the plural self-identities (i.e., as Turkish citizens, as Muslims, and as females)' (p. 564) of these women. The policy had affected participants' identities as Turkish citizens in three major ways. It had made the participants to feel (1) as undesirable citizens in society, (2) restricted or not free in society, and (3) more politicized

citizens. In addition, the policy had negatively affected participants' identities as Muslims: it had made them experience feelings of 'fears, dilemmas, and guilt' as they were acting 'against their Islamic beliefs' (p. 575). Further, the policy had affected participants' identities as females as they viewed it as a sign of gender discrimination. According to Seggie and Austin (2010), this is because the participants believed that the policy had been a product of men's decision making in a male dominated society. As a result of enforcing the policy, the participants felt that their femaleness was under attack. As females, they also felt unattractive, passive, and naked and appreciated the importance of the hijab in their lives more than before.

Other studies have highlighted the existence of different negative feelings amongst veiled Muslim women, which were attributed to wearing the hijab (Abdallah-Shahid, 2008; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). For example, 7 Muslim female students in a U.S. study (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003) about Muslim women's definition of veiling, their reasons for taking up the hijab, and their interactions with faculty and peer groups, reported feelings of isolation, alienation, and discrimination on campus, which they attributed to wearing the hijab. Further, the findings of the study indicated that as a result of the negative experiences associated with wearing the hijab on campus, a number of Muslim students decided to remove their veils, instead of withdrawing from the academia. These students argued that they could still practice modesty even without the hijab. Other Muslim students, who viewed the hijab as a religious obligation, however, decided to continue wearing the hijab despite the negative experiences associated with wearing it on campus.

Another study by Cole and Ahmadi (2010), examining Muslim students' experiences of higher education, indicated that Muslim students (including males and females) were less satisfied with their experiences of college compared to their Jewish counterparts. According to Cole and Ahmadi (2010), compared to Jewish and Christian students, Muslim students were more involved in 'racial/cultural awareness workshops, having a roommate of a different race/ethnicity, socializing with someone of a different racial/ethnic group, and participating in a racial/ethnic specific organization' (pp. 133-134). Similarly, Abdallah-Shahid's study (2008) highlighted feelings of 'alienation, stigma, embarrassment and identity concerns' (p. IV) amongst six veiled Muslim female students, who were attending secular schools in the U.S.

Investigating factors that make Muslim women to take up or give up the veil in Canada, Meshal (2003) conducted a survey on young Muslim women. The participants ranged from 18 to 30 years old and were mostly university students. The research took place in Ten Canadian Cities in the 1997-1998 academic years. One of the findings of the study was that compared to the participants who did not wear the hijab, those who wore the hijab felt more ambivalence from the greater Canadian society. They identified different reactions from Canadians ranging from 'tolerant, respectful and highly supportive, to rude, disdainful and even insulting' (p. 35). Many of the participants believed that non-Muslim Canadians 'were fixated on the hijab as a mark of Islam's oppression of women' (p. 85) or felt 'overt pressure from society at large to remove the hijab' (p. 85). On the other hand, participants who did not wear the hijab felt more ambivalence towards the Muslim community. Although most of them reported a neutral reaction from the rest of Muslim community, about half of them believed that wearing the hijab would elicit Muslim community's respect and trust towards the wearer. This group of participants felt more integrated into Canadian society. They reported having more non-Muslim friends and showed tendency to call themselves Canadians. Meshal has concluded that 'it is impossible to separate the issue of hijab in the Canadian context from larger questions of gender and cultural identity, assimilation and discrimination' (p. 102).

Hu et al., (2009) investigated the day-to-day living experiences of immigrant Muslim women in the U.S. and examined gender-specific norms such as the practice of the hijab. Hu et al. highlighted Muslim women's agencies to practice their religion and continue wearing the hijab and concluded that 'first generation Muslim women have resorted to the traditional cultural and gender-specific norms and practices to negotiate their identities, rather than succumbing to the dominant American culture' (p. 50).

Dwyer (1999) highlighted the veil as a powerful and over-determined marker of difference for British Muslim women. Dwyer also discussed the role of the veil in the discursive formation of category Muslim women and argued that 'dress function as a contested signifier of identity for young British Muslim women through the operation of different discourses by which oppositional and fixed meanings are attached to different dress styles' (p. 20).

This study focused ‘particularly on the ways in which bodies are marked as different within different spaces through a consideration of one bodily marker, the role of dress’ (p. 5) and emphasized the agency exercised by the participants to challenge the dominant and fixed meanings attached to dress. Focusing on the possibilities of the veil to create alternative femininities for the young British Muslim girls participated in the study, Dwyer (1999) demonstrated the way different dress styles were actively used by the participants in the construction of their multiple identities and concluded that ‘the possibilities of multiple subjectivities warn against any straightforward reading of identities from the body’ (p. 21).

Drawing on the work of Mernissi (1991a), Hamzeh (2011) has focused on the way the three hijabs, including the visual, spatial, and ethical hijabs (Mernissi, 1991a) construct a genderizing discourse in the lives of many Muslim girls. In this study, Hamzeh (2011) studied four Muslim girls between the ages of 14 to 17 and argued that these Muslim girls’ parents enforced all three hijabs and, through this genderizing discourse, limited their daughters’ learning opportunities. The study also highlighted Muslim girls’ agency and demonstrated that Muslim girls gradually ‘questioned and de-veiled the hijabs in their dress, mobility in public places, and physical behavior around boys’ (p. 481). Hamzeh argued that the systematic enforcement of the three hijabs by the Muslim parents, along with the girls’ confusion caused by the messages conveyed by the three hijabs, which had constructed the girls as ‘gendered and sexualized objects needing protection and discipline’ (p. 500), made the hijabs a genderizing discourse. In this way, according to Hamzeh, the lives of these four Muslim girls were challenged. Further, Hamzeh discussed the process of doubting and questioning this genderizing discourse by the Muslim girls, who finally demonstrated their agencies by de-veiling all three hijabs.

The aforementioned studies on Muslim women and the veil are insightful to my research. As mentioned in Chapter One, a part of my research also deals with the hijab; one of my research questions is specifically about the hijab and women’s perceptions of it. However, what distinguishes my research from the studies mentioned above is that it highlights the cultural and historical specificities of Muslim women’s lives in relation to the practice of veiling and in the context of higher education in Canada. It also attempts to provide further knowledge about the saliency of the hijab and its significance in the lives and education of Diasporic Muslim women. Thus, my research is a contribution to the existing literature in the area. In addition, it

emphasizes the centrality of Muslim women's agencies and voices about the hijab in Canadian universities. In my opinion, instead of trying to demonstrate the negative and positive impacts of the hijab on Muslim women's lives and their experiences in educational settings, one must start by listening to Muslim women's voices about the hijab. As evident from my research questions, the intention of this study was to explore Muslim women's perceptions of the hijab and examine what it means to wear or not to wear the hijab, from their perspectives. It should be noted that, as discussed in this section, there are a number of other studies that have demonstrated Muslim women's voices about the meanings of the hijab. However, what distinguishes my research from these studies is that it highlights the need for analyzing the hijab in light of the context specific factors such as those related to the cultural and political contexts associated with the participants' countries of birth.

2.2.2 Muslim Women, Labor Market, and Workplace Discrimination

As mentioned earlier, under the general subject of Muslim women, a number of studies have dealt with Muslim women, labor market, and workplace discrimination (Hamdani, 2004; Mc Cue, 2008; Parker-Jenkins et al., 1999; Siann & Clark, 1992; Syed & Pio, 2010). These studies will be discussed briefly in this section.

A number of studies in Australia have highlighted discrimination and stereotyping that Muslim women face in their workplace (Mc Cue, 2008; Syed & Pio, 2010). For example, Mc Cue (2008) discusses overt racial and religious discrimination, stereotyping and discrimination based on the religious dress and language skills, especially for newcomers, as barriers to workforce participation of Australian Muslim women.

Similarly, in a study about workplace experiences of Muslim women in Australia, Syed and Pio (2010) identify the workplace experiences of migrants including 'English proficiency, family roles, skill recognition, societal stereotypes, cross-cultural and religious differences, and gaps in social capital' (p. 133). These authors note that the workplace experiences of Muslim women are the result of multiple causes and cannot be attributed to just one factor such as organizational policies. Therefore, Syed and Pio (2010) emphasize 'the need for sophistication in dealing with the complexities presented by migration, ethnicity, religion and gender' (p. 115). The findings of the study highlight 'triple/multiple jeopardy faced by the Muslim migrant women participated in

the study, because of interweave of gender, ethnicity, religion, and country of origin' (p. 132). The findings also demonstrate Muslim women's resilience and agency in response to their workplace challenges.

Other studies in the U.K. highlight teachers' low educational expectations for Muslim female students (Parker-Jenkins et al., 1999) and school counselors' stereotypical attitudes towards them (Siann & Clark, 1992). For example, in their study on Muslim women and their educational experiences and career destinations, Parker-Jenkins et al., (1999) highlight the participants' lack of support and motivation from their teachers. Parker-Jenkins et al., conclude that some teachers seemed not to have high expectations for their Muslim students. The diversity of Muslims and the fact that Muslim communities are not unitary or homogenous are also emphasized in the study.

The stereotypical attitudes of school counselors about Muslim female students and their families are highlighted by Siann and Clark (1992). They argue that the stereotypical views about Muslim female students as not interested in pursuing higher education and career opportunities has nothing to do with the reality of their lives. They also state that there is no evidence supporting the stereotype about Muslim families blocking their daughters' entry into higher education and workplace. All of the participants in this study asserted that their parents were supportive of them, and encouraged them to pursue higher education and future careers. Therefore, the study has highlighted the supportive role of Muslim families in their daughters' educational and occupational opportunities, and recommended more effort to direct members of different ethnic communities towards counseling professions. In this study, Siann and Clark also called for more dissemination of career and educational information to parents in vernacular language as well as in English and also for more sensitivity from the counselors' sides towards different cultural needs and values.

In another study, Hamdani (2004) found that although Muslim women represent one of the most highly educated faith communities in Canada, the number of jobless Muslim women declined only slightly in the 1990s. In addition, according to Hamdani, even with jobs, many Muslim women do not work in their field of specialization, but hold term, casual, and part-time jobs.

Moreover, the rate of unemployment among Muslim women (16.5 percent in 2001) has been more than two times the overall national female unemployment rate in Canada (Hamdani, 2004).

Although studying Muslim women career opportunities was not at the centre of this study, what has made the findings of the above-mentioned literature relevant to this research is the significance of the reductive, negative stereotypes about Muslim women on their career experiences. One of the intentions of this study was to understand Muslim women's opinions about, and reactions to, the existing stereotypes in Canadian higher educational institutions.

2.2.3 Muslim Women and Popular Media

This section will focus on studies that have concentrated on Western popular media and the way they have constructed a distorted picture of Muslim women as oppressed by Islamic patriarchy (for example, see Bilge, 2010; Bodman & Tohidi, 1998; Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Falah, 2005; Honarbin-Holiday, 2013; Khan, 2014; Khiabany & Williamson, 2008; Peek, 2003; Sensoy & Marshal, 2010; Watt, 2011a).

The educative effects of popular media in shaping public opinions about Muslims and the politics around construction of Muslim women's identities in western societies have been the subjects of a number of studies (for example, see Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Honarbin-Holiday, 2013; Khan, 2014; Khiabany & Williamson, 2008; Sensoy & Marshal, 2010; Watt, 2011a). In addition, a number of these studies have highlighted the role of the hijab. These studies discussed how popular media project a distorted picture of veiled Muslim women as oppressed and passive (Bilge, 2010; Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Khiabany & Williamson, 2008).

For example, a recent study by Khan (2014) in Canada highlighted the twin stereotypes of the oppressed and exotic Afghan Muslim women in western societies. In her study, Khan focused on the stories of two Afghan women. The first woman is Bibi Aisha whose story was articulated in Time Magazine in 2010. As Khan pointed out, Bibi Aisha is representative of all oppressed Afghan women, who urgently need to be saved. The second woman is Sharbat Gula, whose image was printed in 1985 on the cover of National Geographic. According to Khan, 'her image stands in contrast to another Orientalist image' which is 'sexualized and exotic young Afghan girl' (p. 101). Khan (2014) concluded that:

Unable and/or unwilling to fully guarantee the civil rights of racialized and impoverished women at home, western states deflect attention to Afghan women's issues as a way of maintaining popular support for a war whose aim may not include, certainly as its main priority, the securing of Afghan women's rights (p. 108).

In their study of some novels on Muslim girls and their lives in the Middle East, written mostly by white women since September 11, 2001, Sensoy and Marshal (2010) clearly highlighted the negative, reductive stereotypes about Muslim women prevailing in western societies. These included stereotypes such as Muslim women as veiled, nameless, silent, and in need of rescue by the west. Sensoy and Marshal argued that 'these young adult novels serve as de-facto legitimization for the U.S.-led incursions in the region as a project of women's emancipation' (p.16).

Horwedel (2006) discussed American media and the role it plays in portraying a distorted picture of Islam and Muslims, and perpetuating misconceptions about them. Horwedel also highlighted Muslim students' knowledge of this process and argued that they are quite aware about the politics behind this process. In addition, Horwedel argued that since the perceptions of Americans about Islam and Muslims grow increasingly negative, many Muslim students and faculty members in American universities are pushed to educate non-Muslims about Islam and Islamic beliefs. She emphasized the fact that while some Muslims get overwhelmed and tired with this burden, 'others embrace the opportunity to increase awareness and understanding (p. 14)'.

Bullock and Jafri (2000) have highlighted the role of the media and discussed how the media represent Muslim women as "Others" who do not adhere to Canadian values and promote anti-Canadian values such as gender oppression. The findings of another study, by Peek (2003) about Muslim students' experiences on university campuses post 9/11 revealed that most of the participants were completely aware of the destructive role that the media plays to project an impaired image of Islam and Muslims. The participants, who were Muslim undergraduate and postgraduate students from 7 New York City campuses, 'blamed the media, 100%, for any discrimination or backlash they occurred post September 11' (p. 280).

The politics of knowledge production related to Muslim women in western literary traditions and contemporary feminist writing is also examined by Zine. Zine (2002) has discussed ways in which ‘the cultural production of knowledge about Muslim women has been implicated historically by the relations of power between Muslim world and the west’ (p. 1). She explains how Muslim women’s voices are excluded from the dominant discourse and argues that ‘in producing knowledge on Third World women and particularly Muslim women, the issue of voice is compromised by the political investment in maintaining academic proprietorship over the discourse as part of western knowledge of the Other’ (p. 53). Thus, according to Zine:

Europe’s colonization of the Islamic world enacted a whole political economy that had its own discursive ideological subtext. Muslim women entered the ‘imaginative geography’ of the orient as both an object of desire and a repressed maiden in need of rescue. The latter trope became more conventional in gaining consent and justification for colonial intervention to ‘rescue’ Muslim women from their anachronistic and misogynist worlds (p. 10).

Therefore, one can see how the urgency for rescuing the oppressed, subjugated, veiled Muslim women from their fate has been masterly justified through this process. In her recent work entitled “do Muslim women need saving?” Abu-Lughod (2013) has also challenged the ‘new common sense’ that legitimates westerners’ interventions in other countries in the name of women’s rights and ‘going to war for women’ (pp. 54-55).

In addition, Zine (2002) highlights the nature of the colonial feminism and argues that during the colonial period, feminists had the same exoticization gaze as the male gaze and maintained and used western’s hegemonic power over the Orient to represent and define it.

Studying the portrayals of Muslims in the mass media, Watt (2011a) pointed to the complexities of Muslim women’s lives in Canada and highlighted the ways dominant meanings about Islam and Muslims have been constructed and represented as facts in popular cultural sites. She also highlighted the ways these truths have passively and unconsciously been taken for granted by people.

Through analyzing the contents of 215 comic books, beginning in the early 1950, Shaheen (1994) highlighted the negative images of Arabs projected in American comic books and explained that ‘of 218 Arab types appearing in the 215 comics studied, the author found 249 characters shown as commoners. Interestingly, not a single Arab heroine or hero was featured’ (p. 123).

In addition, Shaheen (1994) demonstrated the images of Arab Muslim women in these comics as ‘voiceless, featureless, and mindless, and devoid of personality’ (p. 129). The images of Arab Muslim women in these comics, according to Shaheen have been ‘one of two illustrations, either a scantily-clad and salivated-upon belly dancer, or a faceless housewife, whose thick-set form is bundled up in dark robes’ (p. 129). Shaheen has argued that, ‘by continually portraying Arabs as villainous, comic books form obstacles to understanding the Arab’s humanity’ (p. 133).

A number of researchers have studied ways that Muslim women have been constructed as the “Other” in the print media (for example, Falah, 2005; Khiabany & Williamson, 2008). Through a systematic survey of the daily newspapers— The Columbus Dispatch, Chicago Tribune, The Plain Dealer, and Los Angeles Times— over a period ranging from September 11, 2001 to March 2003, Falah (2005) examined how Muslim women and their lives had been narrowly constructed and projected as “Others”, in the U.S. print media. Falah concluded that ‘editors have systematically selected images of women and girls to communicate political turmoil in Muslim societies and to convey the supposedly liberating impacts of U.S. interventions in these regions’ (p. 317).

By concentrating on the U.K.’s biggest selling tabloid, The Sun, Khiabany and Williamson (2008) also discussed the debate over the veil and ‘the politicization of British Muslims, where the veil is an increasingly political image of both difference and defiance’ (pp. 69-70). In their work, they clearly pointed to tabloid newspapers’ racist attitudes towards Islam and their coverage of Muslims. They argued that:

...The image of veiled Muslim women in the Sun, while situated in this ‘us’ and ‘them’ binary, altered in the period after 9/11. The key shift in the representation of veiled Muslim women has been from an image of an oppressed victim without agency who needs to be ‘saved’ by the West to the image of an aggressor who has been granted too

much agency by western liberalism. Whereas just over a decade ago the veiled women was sympathetically constructed in the British media as the 'victim' of extremism, now Muslim women are marked out as ungrateful subjects who not only have failed to 'assimilate' but who are deemed to threaten 'our freedom' (p. 77).

Khiabany and Williamson (2008) emphasized the fact that obviously neither of these images belongs to the veiled Muslim women, but to the media and politicians who aim to justify wars and bombing of Iraq and Afghanistan. Bilge (2010) has also discussed the stereotypical images of veiled Muslim women simultaneously portraying her as a victim of Muslim culture and a threat to the west.

Through a nuanced analysis of Muslim Iranian women's lives in contemporary Iranian society Honarbin-Holiday (2013) has challenged the negative reductive stereotypes about Muslim Iranian women's identities prevailing in western societies. She has highlighted the impaired images of Iranian Muslim women constructed and perpetuated by the media as oppressed and pointed out:

Their (Iranian women's) narratives are a world apart from the stereotyped propaganda and misplaced imagination of the west. Rather, they suggest patterns in thought and courageous behavior which push boundaries and resist forms of subordination (p. 7)

In addition, throughout her book, Honarbin-Holiday (2013) has demonstrated how Iranian Muslim women have 're-defined their identities' and equipped themselves 'with increased self-knowledge and self-confidence through education' (p. xi).

In an edited work about women in Muslim societies, Bodman and Tohidi (1998) have also challenged 'the simplistic, negative stereotypical image of Muslim women as the passive victims presented in popular media' (p. 279). The book has highlighted women in Muslim societies as active agents in initiating positive changes in society. Being an Iranian Muslim woman living in the west herself, Tohidi (1998) has demonstrated Iranian women's agency and noted that 'relative to the extent of sexist discrimination and repression in present-day Iran, women have shown a remarkable degree of resilience in maintaining their social presence and agency' (284).

In addition, Tohidi (1998) has articulated that Iranian Muslim women have done this through different avenues such as, ‘subtly circumventing the dictated rules (e.g. re-appropriating the veil as a means to facilitate social presence rather than seclusion, or minimizing and diversifying the compulsory hijab and dress code into fashionable styles)’ (p. 284).

The aforementioned body of the literature dealing with the effects of popular media in constructing a monolithic and Orientalist picture of Muslim women’s lives in Diaspora is directly related to my research. Additionally, the findings of these studies further inform my understanding of the power dynamics at play, which have portrayed Muslim women as the ‘Other’ and from an Orientalist viewpoint. I intend to examine Muslim female students’ perceptions and their knowledge about the power dynamics in the construction of the category Muslim women as oppressed by Islamic patriarchy in this research. Another intention of this research has been to portray the complexities and heterogeneity of Muslim women’s lives in Diaspora.

2.2.4 Muslim women and Construction of their Identities

Under the broad umbrella of Muslim women and their challenges, there are a number of studies that specifically deal with Muslim women in Diaspora and the challenges regarding (re)construction of their fluid and multiple identities (for example, see Keddie, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Mirza, 2013; Khan, 1995a, 2000, 2002; Sirin & Fine, 2008). This section will discuss the existing Canadian and international literature about Muslim women and (re)construction of their identities in Diaspora.

A number of studies have discussed the process of construction of dual identities based on one’s racial origin and nationality (Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sirin et al., 2008; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). For example, constructing and navigating ‘dual identities as Muslims and American college students’ (p. 452) is highlighted by Stubbs and Sallee (2013). In the study, and through using bicultural acculturation, the researchers have demonstrated that Muslim students were able to preserve the Islamic values and beliefs while internalizing American society’s norms. This way, Stubbs and Sallee have argued that, Muslim students hardly seek accommodations from their peers or universities for their religious needs.

The concepts of hyphenated selves and hyphenated identities have been highlighted and discussed by Sirin and Fine (2008) in their book entitled “Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities through Multiple Methods”. According to Sirin and Fine these concepts refer to young Muslim immigrants’ ‘many identities, including their standings as Muslims and Americans that are at once joined and separated by history, politics, geography, biography, longings, and losses’ (p. 3). Emphasizing the fluid nature of this hyphenated identity ‘that is open to variation at the group (e.g., racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity) and the individual levels’ (p. 5), Sirin and Fine carefully discussed how young first and second-generation Muslims in the U.S. negotiate their Muslim and American identities through ‘the psychological dynamics of working the hyphen’ (p. 6).

In another study on Muslim-American emerging adults conducted by Sirin et al., (2008), a more integrated model of ‘hyphenated selves’ has been introduced. In this study, the researchers highlight the coexistence of multiple identities amongst most of the participants. The findings of this study indicate that while most young American Muslims have been successful to experience ‘their Muslim and American selves either as a coherent whole (integrated), or in separate domains of life (parallel)’ (p. 274), only a small number of them have experienced identity conflict. In addition, while ‘U.S. orientation’ had positively affected American identification amongst the participants, ‘discrimination-related stress’ and ‘home country orientation’ had negatively affected American identification amongst them (p. 274).

Further, the researchers have not been able to find any gender differences between the participants and their experiences. The only gender difference that they found was that the female participants had mostly exhibited integrated identities whereas the male participants had mostly exhibited parallel identities. To explain this, Sirin et al., (2008) noted that since most of the female participants did not wear the hijab, they were not visible enough to be targets of discrimination. Therefore, they felt more integrated in society. Another reason for this, according to the researchers, is that in the American society, female Muslims less likely associated with terrorism while male Muslims were usually targeted as dangerous and terrorist.

Considering various markers of differentiation such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion in constructing multiple identities for Muslim women, different studies have highlighted

one, two, or more of these markers of differentiation and their role in constructing multiple identities for Muslim women (Mir, 2009b, 2011; Mourchid, 2009).

For example, Mourchid (2009) has highlighted the development of religious and sexual identity among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) American Muslim students. The study examines the narratives of gay and lesbian Muslim university students and argues that the participants experience tremendous tensions, and at times crises, when they begin to explore the meaning of their sexual identities in Islam. According to Mourchid, this is because the dominant Islamic narrative about homosexuality is conservative and does not allow any alternative sexual practices outside the traditional sexual relationship between a man and a woman. According to Mourchid, this process has clearly shown the saliency of religious identity amongst these students. Mourchid (2009) concludes that:

One can argue that the struggle to embrace the sexual identity of being lesbian or gay has secularized and spiritualized the religious identity of these Muslim students and created a third space or discourse where tensions of the sexual and the religious identities have been renegotiated, re-examined, and redefined (p. 112).

Mir (2009b, 2011) has also explored gendered identity construction amongst American Muslim women. In a paper entitled “‘Just to make sure people know I was born here’: Muslim women constructing American selves”, Mir (2011) examined how Muslim American undergraduate women construct their ‘immigrant, gendered, youthful, Muslim, and American’ identities (p. 547). Mir (2011) pointed to assimilation and its ‘inhospitable and harmful’ nature towards ‘cultural identities such as Muslim, ethnic, transnational, and immigrant cultures,’ (p. 559). Mir concluded that Muslim Americans who wish to integrate into American society should ‘disguise themselves, and should normalize as less religious, less cultural, and less ethnic, while those seeking to resist assimilation have the option of ‘loud identities’” (p. 559). Other studies in the U.K. (Basit, 1997) highlight the challenges of constructing a British Muslim identity for Muslim female students in Britain and the challenges they usually face in exercising a ‘double standard, conforming to the west at school and to the east at home’ (p. 437).

Mir (2009b) also explored construction of gendered identity amongst Muslim female undergraduate students in two university campuses in the U.S. and identified two sources of

surveillance that form Muslim women's gendered identity. Mir argued that 'under the twin towers of surveillance by Muslim communities and the majority, Muslim women's gendered behavior fuses resistance with conformity to both dominant majority stereotypes and Muslim expectations' (p. 237). The study highlighted the multiple, shifting, and fluid nature of American Muslim undergraduate women's gendered identity in multiple spaces.

Exploring the role of religion in shaping the educational identities of Muslim college students, Rida (2004) discussed that Muslim women are different in their religiosity and understanding of their identity. The study highlighted the process of identity formation amongst Muslim women as an open ended process and indicated that in order to shape their identities, many Muslim women turn to their teachers and other significant persons in their lives. The findings indicated American schools' insensitivities toward Muslim students' needs, and the need for more research in this area to address Muslim students' needs, especially from the perspective of school staff.

In the U.K., Butler (1999) examined the experiences and attitudes of second-generation Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim women. The main concern of this study was 'to examine the method by which factors such as religion, gender, and ethnicity are experienced and utilized to form and transform the lives of these women in British society' (p. 144). Butler's research highlighted Muslim women's strong commitment to their religion and their move towards a more Islamic identity in Britain. This research concluded that the second-generation Muslim women in Britain 'are not torn between two cultures' (p. 146). In other words, they do not abandon their parents' culture to adopt British culture but adopt and choose different parts of each culture to reach 'a workable middle course between British and Pakistani/Asian culture' (p. 147). Butler also emphasized the impacts of factors such as race, class, and gender on the choices that second-generation Muslim women in Britain make in the process of cultural redefinition. Therefore, according to Butler, the process of cultural redefinition is not simply the result of individuals' preferences to choose one cultural model over another. Rather, it is the result of the ways in which people perceive and respond to factors such as race, class, and gender to transform their own identity.

Drawing on the black feminist framework of embodied intersectionality, in a study conducted in the U.K., Mirza (2013) discussed how the intersection of race, gender, and religion is written and

experienced within the body. According to Mirza, this framework has shown the way the three participants 'were constructed as recognizable visible Muslim others in discourse'; it has also shown 'how that affective representation is signified and mediated by the body and experienced as a lived reality' (p. 13). Exploring the narratives of the study's participants consisted of three professional Muslim women of Pakistani, Turkish, and Indian heritage, Mirza concluded that:

The process of being and becoming an intersectionally situated gendered and raced subject of discourse reveals not only the discursive effects of hegemonic power and privilege which 'name' the Muslim woman, but also highlights her embodied agency to consciously rename her identity as lived at the intersecting cross-roads of her transnational journey (p. 13).

In their book about Muslims and their voices in school, Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009) highlight the ways Muslim students negotiate their identities within the mainstream schooling in the west. In fact, the ultimate goal of their book was to challenge the reductive prevailing stereotypes and narratives about Muslims in western mainstream schools and in the media.

By conducting interviews with a number of adolescent Muslims involved in a youth program, Khan (2009) provides a clear picture of the ways mainstream schools have ignored Muslim students and their feeling and experiences. According to Khan, to cope with the challenges of attending predominantly non-Muslims schools in the U.S., Muslim students have used a number of strategies. Khan observes that:

Crisis has often been thought of as a central aspect of adolescence and identity formation. For Muslim American youth, there have been systematic efforts to locate the crux of their crisis in the 'clash of culture' which is perceived to be inherent in their backgrounds as practicing members of the Islamic faith and residence of a democratic and secular united states (p. 37).

In her personal account as an immigrant Canadian of Arab heritage, Al Houseini (2009) discussed the ways school-based discourses have influenced her identity construction as a Palestinian-Canadian Muslim. In her essay, a life narrative about identity and flux, Al Houseini demonstrated the importance of fostering safe spaces for students with shared group identities,

and providing them with opportunities to use a shared language for communicating their racialized experiences.

Through a nuanced examination of Arab Muslim women's views and perceptions about their lives in Canada, Hamdan (2009) has challenged western negative stereotypes of Muslim women and their lives, and stated that the participants in her study have created a space for themselves 'in which they embrace their Islamic identity and transcend boundaries that have reduced them to subservient victims of their faith' (p. 138).

In the U.K., Keddie (2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2014) has studied issues such as identity formation, empowerment, and agency amongst marginalized Muslim students. She discussed the discursive positionalities of educators in educational settings, and the ways educators' positioning can affect Muslim students' empowerment.

Focusing on the experiences of three Muslim refugee girls settled in Australia and drawing on post-structural understanding of agency, Keddie (2011a) explored the issues of schooling, identity, and empowerment amongst marginalized students. The study called for moving away from the simplistic notions of identity and empowerment and embracing a reflexive approach to these notions, which consider the complexity and fluidity of these constructions and are informed by the framing discourses shaping minority students' identities. To this end, Keddie argued that educators must be informed about their own positionality 'as partial, interested, and potentially oppressive' (p. 224). According to Keddie, paying attention to the context and the fact that schools 'as institutions of social regulation and inequity' (p. 224) can hinder educators' efforts to empower students are also crucial. These findings highlighted the effective impacts of the context (Lamington school as the sight of the study), as well as the educators, who had adopted a reflexive approach to empowerment to critically reflect on their own positionality and empower the three refugee Muslim student participants in the study.

Keddie (2011b) also conducted a study on three female Muslim educators in three English schools and underlined the 'discursive positionings' of the three educators, and 'how such positionings generate framing discourses that both shut down and open up opportunities to support Muslim girls' (p. 186). Juxtaposing the three educators' stories clearly showed how educators could foster spaces of empowerment and agency for marginalized students. The stories

highlighted how one of the educator's own positioning as a white, middle class, western Muslim female educator generated incomplete framing discourses, which homogenized the Muslim students' culture, ignored the significant role of race and ethnicity in their lives, and failed to respect their different framing discourses that had shaped their identities as marginalized Muslim immigrant students of Pakistani heritage. In contrast, the positionality of the two other educators as women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage generated alternative framing discourses capable of acknowledging the complexity of the discourses that shaped the students' identities. As a result, Kiddie (2011b) called for greater sensibility of educators to critically examine their own positionalities, as well as a greater attention to 'listening to feminist voices from the margins'. The study also disrupted 'the epistemic privilege of western-informed views of female empowerment' (p. 175).

In another study, Keddie (2009) presented the practices of one female English educator, who had recently converted to Islam, to support Muslim immigrant girls from Pakistani heritage through an Islamic discussion group. Considering the educators' positionality as white, western, and middle class, the study highlighted some of the limitations of the educator's 'libratory approach' and advocated for 'a self-reflexive approach that was sensitive to how ethnic-specific sociability shapes understanding and enactment of gender' (p. 265). The study also demonstrated how the educator homogenized the Muslim girls' 'ethnic-specific Asian sociability as oppressive' (p. 276), and overlooked the complexity of the ways such sociability formed the Muslim students' religious and gender identities. Despite these limitations in the educators' approach, it has highlighted the importance of political actions to give Muslim girls a voice and gain greater gender equity for them.

Highlighting the ways three female Muslim educators in an English school supported Muslim girls to gain self-determination through an Islamic discussion group, another study, conducted by Keddie (2014), advocates for a just politics that begins with overcoming status subordination. The study has demonstrated how these three Muslim educators represented Islam to the Muslim students as 'gender empowering rather than constraining' (p. 368). As Keddie (2014) has argued:

In line with Muslim feminist argument, this involved conceiving of Islamic values and texts as open to interpretation and drawing on the principles of gender justice within these

values and texts to transform the concrete arrangements undermining their self-determination (i.e. patriarchal interpretations of Islam) (p. 368).

In her works on Muslim women and (re)construction of their identities in the Diaspora, Khan (2002, 2000, 1995a) interviewed fourteen Muslim women about their sense of power, authenticity, and place. In her works, she presented the voices of these Muslim women about how they construct and sustain their Islamic identities and destabilize static notions of their identities. Khan (1995a) questioned the category 'Muslim woman' as a construct, and indicated that the structured contradictions in the construct 'Muslim woman' have made Muslim women feel ambivalent when facing the contradictions. According to Khan (1995a), some women have named the contradictions and some have not, nonetheless, many of them who faced these contradictions have expressed uncertainty and doubt about their identities as Muslim women.

In addition, Khan (2002) challenged western perception of Islam as monolithic and static, and emphasized that the category 'Muslim' is fluid, mobile, and shifting. Khan's main concern in this book was to examine the ways 'religion, along with race, class, and sexuality function as a fundamental organizing principle of women's lives in diasporic space' (p. x). According to Khan (2002):

Muslim identity can be viewed as heterogeneous and shifting, freeing us from the predetermined boundaries in which we are continuously confined. Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridization in the third space reinforces this disruption and identifies translations of sedimented culture into shifting sites of knowledge and experience. Within this third space, Muslim subjectivity is no longer about an identity politics making claims about absolute knowledge boxed in rigid boundaries, an identity that a few can control (such as Islamist) and others can vilify (such as orientalists) (p. xvi).

Therefore, drawing on the work of Bhabha, Khan (2000, 2002) suggests the creation of a third space to negotiate Muslim women's identities in the Diaspora and argued that:

By opening up supplementary discourses in what has been called the third space, women rescript notions of the original, the pure, and the stereotypical. They resist, contest, and

collude through individual and collaborative strategies in the process of cultural, political, and economic empowerment (Khan, 2002, p. xx).

In another book entitled “Muslim women: Crafting a North American identity”, Khan (2000) states that because this space is a ‘dynamic, unstable, and forever changing’ and ‘it cannot be contained in the familiar static discourses and arguments through which the Muslim woman is normally articulated’ (p. 127), it provides Muslim women with options of individual choices and the freedom that they need to adopt more than one position.

It should be mentioned that considering the impacts of various markers of differentiation such as gender, race, ethnicity and religion and their intersection in (re)constructing multiple identities for Muslim female students is crucial in my research. Evidently, one of the research questions in this study specifically deals with this issue. Therefore, I believe that the studies discussed in this section dealing with the process of identity formation and the challenges regarding (re)construction of identities amongst Diasporic Muslim women, specially Khan’s (2002, 2000, 1995a) regarding the fluidity and shifting nature of the category ‘Muslim women’ and her suggestion for creating a third space to negotiate Muslim women’s identities in the Diaspora (Khan, 2000, 2002) are insightful for, and play a critical role, in my research. Although Khan’s intersectional focus is similar to my research, which analyzes the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion and its impact on Muslim female students’ lives and education in Diaspora, I believe that my research is still distinguishable from her works. Focusing on the specific context of higher education in Canada, my research highlighted Muslim women’s different positionalities and the way the specific location of each Muslim woman impacts their perceptions of the hijab. My intention was to highlight the problems associated with westerners’ tendency to erase the political, cultural, and historical specificities of Muslim women’s lives in the Third World. This tendency portrays a universalized and homogenous picture of all Muslim women as oppressed by Islamic patriarchy. As such, my research examined Muslim female students’ perceptions of and resistance towards the fixed static notion of their identities as the category “Muslim women”. Post-colonial feminist theory, employed for this research, with its significant interpretive potential to deal with the complexities of Muslim women’s lives and identities as well as the issues of power, the politics of knowledge production, and (mis)representation, is useful for fulfilling the objectives of this research.

Although, in a general context, a number of studies have emphasized the need to deconstruct the homogeneity of Muslim women's identities and consider the cultural and historical specificities of Muslim women's lives in Diaspora (see Mohanty, 2003), I believe that there is still a need for further research in this area, particularly in the specific context of higher education in Canada. Through conducting research with a diverse group of Canadian Muslim female students and a nuanced exploration of their views, in this research, I have explored Canadian Muslim female students' perceptions and reactions to the reductive, negative stereotypes. I have been particularly interested in exploring Muslim women attempts to deconstruct the homogeneity of their identities and lives prevailing in the west.

2.3 Summary

This chapter explored the existing Canadian and international literature dealing with the subject of Muslim women. For the purpose of this research, I divided the existing literature into the two different bodies. The first body of the literature focused on Muslim women and their educational experiences, while the second dealt with Muslim women in a general context. The second body of the literature encompassed four different but interconnected themes, including (1) Muslim women and the veil; (2) Muslim women, labor market, and workplace discrimination; (3) Muslim women and popular media; and (4) Muslim women and construction of their identities.

I argued that while there is abundance of literature on issues facing Muslim women in general, studies on Muslim women in the specific context of education are limited. In addition, within this limited body of the literature on Muslim women and their educational experiences, most of the studies have focused on Muslim school girls, and are conducted in the U.K., U.S. and other parts of the world, not in Canada. In other words, the studies that have explored Muslim female university students' experiences of higher education, particularly in Canada, are scarce. This research was an attempt to bridge this gap and provide some insights, although partially, into the experiences of Muslim female students of Canadian higher educational institutions.

The focus of this research was on Muslim female students and their experiences of higher education in Canada. Consequently, in this chapter, I first explored the Canadian and international studies that have dealt with the educational experiences of Muslim female students both in public schools and at the post-secondary education level in universities. This was

followed by a discussion of literature dealing with the effects of college atmosphere on minority students' academic achievement. I believe that studies that dealt with the effects of college atmosphere on minority students' academic achievement are directly relevant to this research. This is because the findings of these studies could reveal some of the challenges that Muslim female students, as members of a visible minority group in Canada, face within Canadian higher educational institutions. The second part of the chapter introduced a number of studies on Muslim women in the general context of the hijab, workplace discrimination, popular media, and identity formation.

Chapter 3

3. Methodology and Methods

This chapter provides adequate answers to the most important methods and methodological questions related to this research. First, I make a distinction between methods and methodology, as I believe paying attention to this distinction is important. According to Harding (1987), methodology refers to the theory of knowledge and interpretive framework considered in any research project. Methods, on the other hand, refer to the techniques used to gather empirical evidence. Therefore, based on this distinction, my goal in this chapter is to discuss both the methodology and methods used in this research. In addition, I intend to introduce my research design through describing ‘a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry, and second to methods for collecting empirical materials’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 25).

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is that the initial plan of research cannot be fixed; it needs to be open and flexible. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) have pointed out, ‘design in a naturalistic sense ... means planning for certain broad contingencies without, however, indicating exactly what will be done in relation to each’ (p. 226). In other words, in qualitative research, the design is emergent; it can change as the researcher gains experience and learns from the participants; it can change even after the researcher enters the field and collects data.

Although ‘there is not an agreed upon structure for how to design a qualitative study’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 41), Patton (2002) lists 12 important questions that must be considered in research design:

what is the primary purpose of the study; what is the focus of study; what are the units of analysis; what will be the sampling strategy; what types of data will be collected; what type and degree of control will be exercised; what analytical approach will be used; how

will the validity of and confidence in the findings be addressed; time issues; how will logistics and practicalities be handled; how will ethical issues and matters of confidentiality be handled; what resources will be available (p. 254).

In the following sections, I answer some of these questions in the context of my research.

3.1 Qualitative Case Study Research

My research best fits under the broad umbrella of qualitative research, which ‘involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). A qualitative research studies phenomena ‘in their natural settings’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3), and attempts to interpret them in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. ‘It consists of a set of interpretive’ that ‘turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

The objectives of a study and its research questions play a major role in choosing the research methods (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) has pointed out, ‘certain kinds of questions lend themselves to qualitative methods....., while other kinds of questions lend themselves to quantitative approaches.....’ (p. 556).

According to Patton (2002), qualitative methods are the best choice when the purpose of the study is to reach an in-depth and detailed understanding of an issue. This is the case in most feminists’ research, and those in favor of social justice and equity. Compared to the quantitative methods which usually use standardized measures on a large pool of samples and produce a set of systematic, succinct, parsimonious, and generalizable findings, qualitative methods typically use naturalistic inquiries on a relatively small number of cases, and produce a wealth of in-depth detailed information with less generalizability (Patton, 2002). In addition, qualitative research usually holds a holistic approach accompanied with careful attention to the context and complexities. These are the factors presented by Patton (2002) as advantages of qualitative research. According to him, ‘the advantages of qualitative portrayals of holistic settings and impacts are that greater attention can be given to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context’ (p. 60).

In view of the research questions, it is not the purpose of this research to generalize across a population of Muslim women. Rather, the purpose of this research is to draw attention to the specificities and complex intersectionality of Muslim women's experiences from their standpoints. To this end, I obtained a detailed in-depth understanding of Muslim female students' views with careful attention to details, context, and nuances of their lives.

As Creswell (2007) has pointed out, when a problem needs to be explored, the best approach is qualitative research. According to Creswell, applying qualitative methods is the best approach when we intend to empower people and encourage them 'to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study' (p. 40). This research pursued all of the aforementioned goals. Therefore, I conducted a case study qualitative research and used qualitative interviews to collect the data.

According to Stake (1995), when a researcher is able to identify the cases with clear boundaries and seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the cases, a case study approach is the best choice. In addition, this method is best applied when 'descriptive questions' or 'explanatory questions' (Yin, 2006, p. 112) or 'when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events' (Yin, 1984, p. 13). The strength of the approach lies in its 'ability to examine, in depth, a case within its real-life context' (Yin, 2006, p. 111). The questions and purposes of this research, discussed earlier in Chapter 1, well justify the adoption of the case study method for this research.

According to Yin (2006), there are three steps in designing a case study: (1) defining the case, (2) deciding on the type of case study, and (3) deciding about the theoretical perspective being used in research. Hereinafter, I will explain each of the three steps as they pertain to my research:

- (1) Since 'the entire design of the case study as well as its potential theoretical significance is heavily dominated by the way the unit of analysis is defined' (Yin, 1993, p. 10), identifying the cases is so important that some people (e.g., Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005) believe that, as a form of research, case study is not a methodological choice, but it is the choice of what is to be defined. As Patton (2002) has pointed out, anything that can be defined as a specific, unique, bounded system is a case. It can be an individual, a group, a

program, a culture, an organization, or a nation-state. In this research, the units of analysis are individuals, namely; Muslim female students in Canadian universities.

- (2) Based on the size and intent of the case analysis, there are different types of case studies (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2005). They are single or multiple, holistic or embedded (Yin, 1984, 2006), intrinsic or instrumental (Stake, 2005), and exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (Yin, 1993) case studies. I believe that this research fits in the category of multiple (holistic) case studies or, alternatively an instrumental case study extended to several cases (Stake, 2005). This research is instrumental because the primary intention, as Stake (2005) has explained, was to provide insights into the mechanisms of a particular issue—social injustice in educational settings—and, therefore, the cases were of secondary interest to me; they had just a supportive role to facilitate my understanding of social injustice. This research is holistic because I cannot identify any logical subunits in this research. As Yin (1984) has pointed out, ‘The holistic design is advantageous when no logical subunits can be identified’ (p. 50). In addition, I used multiple cases, which I believe helped me to strengthen my findings, since they are supposed to be replications of each other (Yin, 2006) and ‘predict similar results (a literal replication)’ (Yin, 1984, p. 53).
- (3) As discussed in Chapter 1, this research is informed by third-wave feminist theory, post-colonial feminist theory, and anti-racist feminist theory, which played a major role in the entire research including the rationale for selecting cases, collecting, and analyzing data.

3.2 Interviews

Interviews are one form of naturalistic inquiries to gather qualitative data and ‘one of the most important sources of case study information’ (Yin, 1984, p. 88). With respect to the characteristics described below, interviews are the best choice for this research.

Interviews consist of open-ended questions and provide in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, and knowledge. The data derived from qualitative interviews ‘consists of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable’ (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Patton (2002) introduced three different approaches to interviews: ‘(1) the informal conversational interview, (2) the general interview guide approach (semi-structured interview),

and (3) the standardized open-ended interview' (p. 349). In many cases, researchers decide to use a combination of all three approaches.

In this research I have conducted semi-structured interview. Using this approach allowed me to move freely and ask questions within the particular subject area identified in my research questions. At the outset of each interview and before asking interview questions, I used an informal and friendly conversation with the participants in order to break the ice and help them feel comfortable. I then continued with a few demographical questions and finally brought up the interview questions. To help the participants have a better idea about the contents of the interviews, I sent the interview questions to each of the participants prior to the interview by an e-mail and asked them to familiarize themselves with the questions or think about them prior to the interview. However, at the time of each interview, I explained to the participants that they are allowed to move freely within the subjects identified in the interview questions, and cover them in any order they wished (see Appendix 1).

I interviewed 10 Muslim female students, who were all students in four different Canadian universities. I interviewed participants in the timeframe between September and November 2013. Each interview lasted about one hour in length and took place in agreed upon locations that were convenient for the participants. All of the interviews were done face to face and audio-recorded. They were filed and stored in my personal laptop, which is protected with a password.

3.3 Philosophical Assumptions about Qualitative Research

Applying qualitative methods in conducting research can be quite controversial. This controversy can be related to the issue of philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). In choosing qualitative research methods, certain philosophical assumptions such as, ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical and methodological assumptions play a major role (Creswell, 2003). In what follows, I discuss each of these assumptions, since they play a major role in this research. I also discuss some ethical issues related to these assumptions.

The most important ontological assumption of a qualitative researcher is that reality is something subjective and multiple. Here, reality is something that is seen by the participants (see Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In other words, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have pointed out, in a qualitative

inquiry 'objective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representation' (p. 5). Therefore, a qualitative researcher provides evidences of the participants' multiple perspectives through their words and quotes (Creswell, 1994, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Believing in the diversity of perceptions has implications for the validity of a qualitative inquiry. Triangulation or crystallization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005) through procedural challenges to explanations (Denzin, 1989), which suggests to look for 'diversity of perceptions, even the multiple realities' (Stake, 2005), is considered 'an alternative to validation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5) in a qualitative inquiry.

The way a qualitative researcher looks at the relationship between the researcher and what/who is researched constitutes a major epistemological stance of the researcher. Here, the goal is to minimize the power relations that exist between the researcher and the researched (Creswell, 2007, 1994).

One of the main concerns of feminist theorists has been the relationship between the researchers and researched. This is because this relationship is, and always has been, a relationship of power regardless of who is conducting the research and who is participating in the research (Harding, 1987)

I am well aware of the power position that I have occupied in the process of conducting this research, and in representing Muslim female students' perspectives and experiences of higher education in Canada. I identified research priorities and the questions to be addressed in the course of this research. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have discussed, I acted as a quilt maker in the research process and stitched the different pieces of the participants' experiences together to make a quilt out of their stories. Although I tried to represent the voices of the participants to the best of my ability, still, I had to be vigilant about, and address the power imbalance inherent in the research process. Fortunately, qualitative research provides strategies for addressing power imbalance. One of the ways that a qualitative researcher can use to tackle the issues of power imbalance is exercising reflexivity and becoming more self-critical (Creswell, 2007, 1994). I will discuss the issue of reflexivity in the following section under ethical issues in qualitative

research. Another strategy to handle the issue of power imbalance is to engage in collaborative research, which is discussed by several scholars.

For example, exploring how qualitative researchers work at the self-Other hyphen and perpetuate domination, Fine (1994) believed that researchers who self-consciously have examined their relations ‘with/for/despite’ (p. 139) Others, and constructed text collaboratively, moved against Othering. On the other hand, researchers who have been ‘neutral transmitters of voices and stories’ (p. 139) have contributed to reproducing Othering.

Minimizing the distance between the researcher and the researched in any qualitative research, and the fact that the researcher must actively engage with the research process and attempt to become an ‘insider’ is emphasized by Creswell (2007, 1994). This assumption has implications for the axiological issue of the role of value in a qualitative study (Creswell, 1994), and has caused heated discussions around issues such as ‘bias’ and ‘objectivity’ (Olesen, 2005), and ‘voice’ (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). These issues play a major role in determining the validity of a qualitative research and relate to ethics. Therefore, due to the association of ethics and epistemology, which holds whenever we talk about post-structural forms of validity (Lather, 1993), I discuss ethical issues below.

3.4 Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

In feminist qualitative research, ethical aspects must be carefully considered before and during the research. These aspects include seeking participants’ consent, avoiding the conundrum of deception, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting anonymity of the participants (Olesen, 2005; Creswell, 2007).

I consciously considered each of the above-mentioned ethical aspects in this research. First, this research conformed to the ethical protocols of Western University. Second, I requested the participants to sign a consent form prior to participating in the research. Finally, I promised the participants that their privacy will be honored and their anonymity protected by giving each of them a pseudonym, in this research. I made it clear to the participants that they had the right to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time during the research.

At the outset of each interview, after a short introduction, I provided each participant with the letter of information and consent form. Appendix 2 and 3 provide a copy of letter of information and consent form, respectively. In trying to build a strong rapport with the participants and to make a safe atmosphere for them to share their experiences, I highlighted the fact that I am also a Muslim female student in a Canadian university. I explained to them that the letter of information is for them to keep for further reference and asked them to sign the consent form. I stored the signed consent forms in a safe, locked place in my office. In all cases, the consent forms were signed without any further questions or concerns.

In addition to the ethical aspects discussed above, and as mentioned earlier, there are other ethical issues related to epistemology. Considering these ethical issues is quite necessary in any qualitative research, especially in feminist qualitative research. Here I provide further details in this regards.

A qualitative researcher acknowledges the facts that research is value-laden (Creswell, 2007, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) that all researchers bring value to the study, and that biases are always present. To tackle the issue of bias, or what Harding (1986) has called ‘the objectivity debates’, Harding’s concept of ‘strong objectivity’ (Olesen, 2005) is insightful. This concept suggests the investigation of the relations between the researcher and the participants, rather than trying to deny it. Meaning that, when a qualitative researcher goes to the field to collect data, she/he needs to be reflective about her/his role and how it shapes what she/he sees, hears, and writes (Creswell, 2007). This process is introduced by Creswell (2007) as one of the strategies for validation. In other words, the researcher must be reflexive or self-disclosing about her/his role in the study, and must position herself/himself in the study (Creswell, 2007, 1994). As Creswell (2007) has pointed out, ‘in this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study’ (p. 208).

Therefore, as a feminist qualitative researcher, and as Olesen (2005) has pointed out, I cannot look at myself as neutral or as an ‘all- knowing, unified, distanced, and context-free seeker of objectified knowledge’ (p. 248). Rather, in this research, I tried to be reflective about my own

position as a Muslim minority female student, which privileges me to occupy the position of an ‘insider’ (Harding, 1991; hooks, 1984; Smith, 1987; Lather, 1996).

Being privileged to occupy an insider position for this research enabled me to do research with my participants rather than research on them. This insider position also helped me to establish a more profound rapport with the participants, and was, definitely, an asset to me (Olesen, 2005; Creswell, 1994).

In addition, the fact that ‘both researcher and participants produce interpretations that are ‘the data’’ (Olesen, 2005, p. 251) has entailed a controversial debate over the issue of voice. This debate has been referred to by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as ‘the crisis of representation’. Here, the question is whose voice is being heard in the final report—the researcher’s voice or the participants’ voices? The technique of ‘member checking’ (Creswell, 2007, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995) as ‘the most critical technique for establishing credibility’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) is a solution to this problem.

Another important philosophical assumption that should be considered in any qualitative research is rhetorical assumptions. Talking about the language of research helps determine the researcher’s rhetorical assumption. Employing the language of qualitative research, which is different from that of quantitative research, a qualitative researcher uses an engaging style of narrative, may use an informal style and the first-person pronoun, and/or personal voices (Creswell, 2007, 1994).

Finally, there are important methodological assumptions to consider in conducting qualitative research. A qualitative researcher uses a hermeneutical/dialectical methodology and attempts to use ‘language grounded in shared experiential context’ (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 195). Using an inductive logic (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007, 1994) and an emerging design (Creswell, 2007) a qualitative researcher studies the participants within their context. In addition, according to Guba and Lincoln (2005), ‘political participation in collaborative action inquiry’ (p. 195) is an important methodological assumption for a qualitative researcher who works within an advocacy/participatory paradigm.

3.5 Interpretive and Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist scholars consider gender to be a powerful factor in shaping people's lives; they also view gender as a significant factor for distributing power and privilege amongst people. Therefore, in doing feminist research, one has to put the social construction of gender at the center of the inquiry (Lather, 1991). This was the main theoretical stance in my research. However, since I worked with Muslim women in this research as members of a racial and religious minority group in Canada, I had to also consider the role of other markers of differentiation, such as race and religion in the construction of Muslim women's experiences. Alongside gender, the impacts of other markers of differentiation such as race, class, sexuality, and religion, and their intersection, have increasingly come to the attention of feminist scholars, especially in the years after 1980s. This is projected in the third-wave feminist theory which was introduced earlier in the Chapter One as one of the theoretical frameworks employed in this research.

One of the most important questions that could arise for this feminist research is whether or not there is a distinct feminist method or a multiplicity of such method? I believe that Olesen's (2005) clarification about three different types of feminist inquiry introduced by Harding and termed as "transitional epistemologies", is insightful in this regards. They include (1) "feminist empiricism" that is of two types, namely; "spontaneous feminist empiricism" and "contextual empiricism", (2) "standpoint theory", and (3) "postmodern theories". Harding (1986) encourages the use of different epistemologies and methodologies since she believes that we need to acknowledge that any one-best-approach to science has many limitations.

Lather (1991) has discussed that while the first wave of feminist research worked within the conventional positivist paradigm, the second wave was more self-consciously methodologically innovative, and used more interactive, contextualized methods with the goal of finding patterns and meanings, rather than prediction and control. Therefore, she believed that 'feminist empirical work is multi-paradigmatic' (p. 30), that is, some feminists work within a conventional, positivist paradigm, some within an interpretive/phenomenological paradigm, and some within a critical/praxis-oriented paradigm mostly concerned with producing emancipatory knowledge and empowering the researched. Similar to Harding (1986), Lather (1991) also emphasized the need

to ‘work against a one best approach’ (p. 31), and believes that ‘the complexity of human situation requires multiple research approaches’ (p. 31).

In sum, although feminist research methods are highly diversified and many disagreements have existed even within the same wing of feminist research (Olesen, 2005), it is possible to identify a number of general characteristics for feminist inquiry (Guerrero, 1999; Thompson, 1992) as follows: (1) feminist research attempts to create a sense of connectedness between researcher and the participants; (2) it is based on participatory approach aimed to raise consciousness and researcher reflexivity; (3) it values ‘women’s way of knowing’; and (4) it attempts to produce knowledge for social change and for women’s liberation and emancipation.

3.6 Recruiting Participants

In qualitative case study research, the main purpose is to gain in-depth understanding, which can be achieved through studying information-rich cases. Therefore, the samples are typically selected through the technique of ‘purposeful sampling’ (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005; Creswell, 2007). There are different strategies for purposeful sampling. In a single study researchers, may use only one strategy or a combination of several strategies (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002).

To recruit participants, I used an advertisement and invited Muslim female students to participate in my research (see Appendix 4). I advertised in four different Canadian universities and in Muslim Student Association (MSA) in each of the four universities. However, I managed to recruit only a few participants through the advertisements. My initial plan was to use ‘snowball sampling’ (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005; Creswell, 2007) to recruit more information-rich participants. Through this technique, the researcher asks the existing participants to refer other information-rich cases to the study. Thus, in view of the difficulties to find other volunteer Muslim female students to participate in my research through the advertisements, I asked the existing participants to refer other suitable cases to the study. Therefore, the rest of the participants were found through the snowball sampling technique. However, using the snowball sampling resulted in a sample that might not have been as diverse as it was planned initially. I explain this in the following paragraphs.

Being Muslim and a female student in a Canadian university were the most important qualifiers for the samples of this study. However, since the intention of this study was to represent the complexities of Muslim female students' experiences within Canadian universities, I tried to select cases that reflected the diversity of this population. Therefore, I planned to use the "maximum variation strategy" (Patton, 2002) or "maximum sampling strategy" (Creswell, 2008), which is a kind of "purposeful sampling". This strategy would help me develop different perspectives and describe central themes that cut across a great deal of variation. Patton (2002) has used the logic of this strategy to describe its strength and stated 'any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon' (p. 235).

Therefore, to fulfill this goal, the next step in the sampling process was to choose Muslim female students who were different in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, fields of study, being secular or traditional, and level of devotion to Islam (through external criteria such as wearing the hijab).

Through snowball sampling, I managed to choose a diverse group of Muslim women in terms of the fields and levels of studies (including graduate and undergraduate levels), marital status, age, ethnicity, language, culture. The only criterion that might not have been addressed sufficiently through this method is the level of devotion to Islam. While I intended to have a diverse enough sample of Muslim women in terms of levels of devotion to Islam and being secular or traditional, the snowball sampling strategy resulted in a larger number of participants who were religiously oriented Muslim female students with a strong sense of Muslim identity. Being religiously oriented means practicing the faith in some levels. Hence, since many religious Muslim women consider wearing the veil as a crucial component in practicing Islam, most of the participants in this study turned out to be veiled and practicing Muslim women (7 veiled students compared to 3 unveiled students). I am well aware that if I had been able to recruit more non-religious and non-practicing Muslim women for my research, my sample would have been richer in terms of the diversity and complexities of Muslim women experiences and perspectives.

3.7 Sample Size

Although 'there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry' (Patton, 2002, p. 244) there are some guidelines for reaching a better judgment about the sample size. For example, in

determining the size of my sample, I considered the trade-offs between breadth and depth of the study. Since my initial purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding with less intention for generalization, with the same limited timeframe and resources for a typical dissertation, I preferred to seek depth of information gained from a smaller sample rather than breadth of information gained from a larger sample. Although the strategy of selecting samples to the point of redundancy (Patton, 2002) is a good strategy for researches with no time and resource limitations, it did not seem to be a good option for me because my timeframe and resources were limited. Patton (2002) has recommended making judgment about a minimum sample size 'based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interest' (p. 246). Therefore, my initial plan was to have a sample of 8 to 10, which seemed reasonable for a typical Ph.D. dissertation. In view of the fact that design in qualitative inquiry is emergent (Creswell, 2007), I could have changed the size based on the research circumstances at any time during the research. However, I did not have to change the initial plan and eventually interviewed 10 Muslim female university students.

3.8 Data Analysis

To explain the overall activities of qualitative data analysis, Creswell (2003) has introduced several generic processes that might be useful. In the analysis of data, I exercised the following generic processes: (1) 'organizing and preparing the data for analysis', (2) 'reading through all the data', (3) 'beginning detailed analysis with a coding process', (4) 'using the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis', (5) 'advancing how the description and themes will be presented in the qualitative narrative', and finally (6) 'making an interpretation or meaning of the data' (p. 190). Stake (1995) and Creswell (2007) have discussed different forms of data analysis and interpretation in a case study research. These forms involve looking for patterns and correspondence between two or more categories. Cross-case analysis was also introduced by Yin (2003) as an analytic technique when two or more cases are studied.

Patton (2002) explains that when there are several cases to be analyzed and compared, the first step in gaining a careful understanding of individual cases is very important. He believes that once this first important step is done, cross-case analysis can begin in order to identify patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences. Therefore, according to Patton (2002), the

initial focus should be on an in-depth understanding of the cases, individually and independently, before combining or aggregating the unique cases, thematically. Creswell (2007) also emphasizes the importance of the first step of data analysis in any case study research, that is, ‘description of the case’, or ‘a detailed view of aspects about the case’ or ‘the facts’ (p. 163).

As Creswell (2003) recommends, in order to analyze the findings of this research, I provided ‘a detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues’ (p. 191) in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 will fulfill the first step of data analysis and provide a detailed description of each of the participants while Chapter 5 will analyze the data for emerging themes.

3.9 Summary

Chapter 3 introduced and discussed the methodology and methods adopted for this research. At the outset of the chapter, I made a distinction between methodology and methods, and discussed the rationale for choosing the methods used in this research. I depicted a clear picture of the initial plan of research or the research design, which is emergent and flexible. I also provided a detailed explanation about every step of conducting the research process, including data gathering, recruiting the participants, and analyzing the data. In addition, I discussed the difficulties that I faced regarding recruiting the participants and some of the limitations imposed on my research by the technique of ‘snowball sampling’ employed for recruiting participants in this research.

Chapter 4

4. Introducing the Study Participants

This chapter introduces the participants in the study and is dedicated to what Creswell (2003) referred to as the first step of data analysis, that is, ‘a detailed description of the setting or individuals’ (Creswell, 2003, p. 191). According to Creswell (2007) and Patton (2002), when there are several cases to be analyzed and compared (like in this research where 10 Muslim female university students are presented and studied), the first step of gaining a detailed understanding of individual cases is very important.

Participants in this research included 10 Muslim female students in a Canadian university at the time of their interviews. I strove to choose a representative sample of Canadian Muslim female university students in terms of the field and level of study, ethnicity, language, culture, and being secular or religious. Table 1 summarizes the participants’ demographic information.

Table 1 : Demographic Information about the Participants

	Name	Country of Origin	Level of Study	Time in Canada	Wearing the Hijab
1	Mica	Sudan	Master's	16 years	Yes
2	Afifa	Pakistan	Ph.D.	6 Years	No
3	Fatima	Sri Lanka	Master's	19 Years	Yes
4	Kausar	Iraq	Undergrad	Born in Canada	Yes
5	Karima	Pakistan	Ph.D.	Born in Canada	Yes
6	Fausia	Egypt	Undergrad	7 Years	Yes
7	Zahra	Iran	Ph.D.	15 Months	No
8	Leila	Iran	Master's	16 Months	Yes
9	Anisa	Pakistan	Master's	Born in Canada	No
10	Jasmine	Pakistan	Master's	Born in Canada	Yes

In the process of data analysis, I realized that although this study's participants featured commonalities in their experiences of higher education in Canada, as projected in the themes to be identified and discussed in Chapter 5, they expressed different and unique viewpoints. The participants' unique viewpoints indicated their different positionalities (see Mohanty, 1991). In other words, different political, cultural, and historical contexts associated with the participants' countries of birth have an impact on their unique experiences of higher education. Mohanty

(1991), amongst others (Bannerji, 1991; Brah, 1992; Friedman 1995; Shohat & Stam 1994) highlights women's positionality by discussing the politics of location, in which she has criticized the tendency by most western feminist discourses to erase the historical and geographical specificity of women's lives in the Third World. She believes that in the process of the discursive production of the "Third World women", which is characterized by a biological, sociological, and anthropological essentialist thinking about women, specific historical differences between women become impossible to analyze. By discussing the politics of location, Mohanty criticizes essentialist thinking about women and their lives, and highlights Third world women's differences in their voices and subjectivities. I found Mohanty's discussion about the importance of considering the specific location of each woman, and avoiding essentialist thinking about them, insightful and crucial in dealing with this study's participants, most of whom came from the Third World.

As I discussed earlier, even though I was able to identify several themes from the participants' viewpoints indicating commonalities in their experiences of higher education in Canada, I noticed that each participant had used a unique lens to make sense of different issues and to formulate her specific experiences. In a number of cases, the issues were so uniquely distinct that I was unable to include them in any of the major themes identified in the next chapter. Therefore, with no intention of drawing a rigid line between the specificities and commonalities of the participants' viewpoints, I discuss in this chapter the specific location of each participant in terms of her race, ethnicity, age, and marital status, and the way the specific location of each participant affected her experiences of higher education in Canada differently. I believe this emphasis is important in highlighting the heterogeneity of Muslim women's lives and identities in Canada.

4.1 Mica

Mica is a graduate student. She was born in Libya but her parents are originally from Sudan. When she was 7 years old, her family immigrated to Canada. She wears the hijab and speaks English fluently and with Canadian accent. Mica believed that she is integrated into the Canadian society. Nonetheless, she has a strong sense of Muslim identity, which she believes she inherited from her family. To explain the role of her family in establishing her Muslim identity, she stated:

I had an established Muslim identity from my family, meaning I, aside from going to my school and interacting with my non-Muslim friends and Muslim friends in a very multicultural community, I went to Islamic classes and learned my Arabic and was in touch with my Arabic, meaning that my parents spoke to me in Arabic and expected that I respond in the same language, so I was being integrated into Canadian society through watching television, school, and relationship with my friends, but at the same time, my parents always valued my culture and my religion.

Based on her own decision to comply with the instructions of her religion, she started to wear the hijab since she was in grade six. As Mica pointed out, she is quite into sports, and loves reading and cats. In her interview, Mica talked about different issues such as Muslim stereotyping, resistance, Muslim identity, race, racism, Othering, and her specific perception about the hijab. She also specifically talked about the intersection of different axes of differentiation and its impact on her identity as a black, young, Muslim woman, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Mica also highlighted the way her gender made her face some challenges in her family. As Mica pointed out, she has always been pressured by her family to focus on her studies, to be a strong person, to be more domestic, and get married. Therefore, Mica has always felt the pressure to fulfill ‘family’s expectations of what a female should be like, for example not to travel too far for university and to stay close to the family’.

4.2 Afifa

Afifa is originally from Pakistan and has been in Canada for about 7 years, since she was admitted to the Ph.D. program. Prior to that, she had been in Canada in 1998, to earn her Master’s degree. She then returned to Pakistan, got married, and came back to Canada along with her family to pursue her Ph.D. degree.

Afifa does not wear the hijab and as she states, she is ‘not a kind of person who prays five times a day’. However she is very spiritual, respects her religion, and tries her best to be a good Muslim woman.

Afifa has a strong connection with her country of origin, Pakistan, and also with her people in Pakistan. She pointed out:

When I hear anything in news or anything bad my own people have done it really hurts me. Actually, when I came to Canada I stopped watching certain T.V. Channels. It is too much sometimes and it really hurts you. I am not a very religious person but my religion has a lot of meaning to me.

Afifa believes that people admire and help her due to the fact that there are not many women from developing countries who can pursue post-secondary education in Canada. She stated:

I think people kind of admire me; they know Muslim women and especially from developing countries there are not so many women who have privilege to go to higher education. So they know there are really a few that have that opportunity and they try to facilitate and help me. Nobody has said to me these things but there are the things that I can feel.

Afifa asserted that she has never experienced discrimination in the university based on her religion but believes that discrimination exists in the Canadian society, although in a very subtle and hard-to-trace way. She argued:

Here everything is hidden. If you apply for a job and you will not get it nobody will tell you the reason. You will not get it without getting any reason or justification. Then so many things come to your mind. Why? Am I not that good? Or is it my language? Or did I do something wrong? I do not know.

As far as employment is concerned, Afifa believed that there are certain positions in certain fields that she can never fill. To explain the discrimination and injustice in Canadian higher educational settings, Afifa gave the example of the university curriculum, which, in her opinion, is too westernized, and stated that as an international student, it is difficult for her to relate to the Eurocentric nature of university curriculum. She argued:

When I was doing my coursework I realized that there was only one class that I could relate because it was about my culture or my story. You know? Only one topic was about me. Otherwise it was all very westernized. We also have some philosophers but we do not read about them, we do not learn about them. If you want to know about them then you have to do extra things. At that moment I was feeling that they invite international

students here, in my class we were 5-6 international students, then for course design they should keep in their mind that we have diversity there therefore there should be more stuff about the things which has affected the east.

According to Afifa, she comes from a middle-class family and believes that her decision to pursue a Ph.D. degree, with a consequence of having just one child, has made her different from the rest of her family. She pointed out:

I am not from a very modern or elite family. I am from a middle class family and I was the first one who came abroad or went to university. Most of my cousins are housewives raising kids and all that. I have just one kid; most of my cousins have four or five kids.

Afifa brought up the issue of gender and traditional gender roles in her family. Although her husband, as Afifa pointed out, is not like traditional husbands, she nonetheless feels that it is her responsibility to do all the housework. Therefore, she feels pressured to strike a balance between her roles as a mother and wife and a busy graduate school student. She stated:

There are so many things that Canadian professors cannot understand. Being a woman, a mother... In our society people get certain kind of training to how to be prepared for their future roles. You get the message that you have to prove yourself as a good mother, daughter, wife...and this is all about sacrifices. One thing that I struggle is that my study demand so much time and energy and most of the time I am trying to balance things out. Sometimes it is ok if you do not cook but I do not know why I always feel guilt and I think it is because of that training or all that observation that you have learned at home with your family. I feel so much bad.

Afifa was critical of the training that most girls in general have received in terms of being domesticated and in service to the family. She argued:

I know there are so many not appropriate or biased things our parents or whoever has made those rules was trying to make women I do not want to say servant but to be conforming to your family or your husband and to be more domestic.

Afifa rightly pointed to the well-known liberal feminist arguments about the barriers that prevent women from attaining their full potential. Liberal feminists discuss issues such as role conflicts, sex stereotyping, equal opportunities, sex discrimination, and socialization (see Arnot & Weiler, 1993).

4.3 Fatima

Fatima is an active, energetic, young student. Her family is originally from Sri Lanka, but she was born in Saudi Arabia. Then, she returned to Sri Lanka and, finally, immigrated to Canada with her family when she was about 6 years old. She speaks English fluently and with Canadian accent. Fatima has been wearing the hijab since she was fourteen years old.

Fatima is into all kinds of sports and specifically, martial arts. She is socially active and has started up an organization for teaching self-defense and martial arts to abused women and children, in an attempt to improve their mental health and well-being. She visits shelters in places such as Toronto, London, India and Sri Lanka. In India, she has worked with street girls. At the time of the interview she pointed out that:

Yesterday I taught 50 women and they love it and they just felt so happy even after one session. I did one in a shelter and even after one session the social worker told me she could see the change in them. Some of these women have been raped, they have been abused, like beaten up and just teaching them a little bit their confidence in themselves improves so much and it is like a safe trusting environment.

Fatima also highlighted the issue of the hijab and the difficulties that Muslim women face to integrate into the Canadian society. She believed that compared to Muslim women who, according to Fatima, 'have extra hurdle to get over' Muslim males can more conveniently integrate into the Canadian society. By 'extra hurdle to get over' Fatima was referring to the adverse impacts of the practice of veiling on Muslim women's integration into the Canadian society, and to the fact that the practice of veiling makes Muslim women more vulnerable to the prevailing gender and racial stereotypes. I will discuss this notion in more detail in the following chapter.

In her interview, Fatima showed her interest in being an active agent in the community and in getting involved in all humanitarian activities around the world. She pointed out:

For me it is very important. I do not want to just be sitting in an office. For me what I want to do is, I want to travel and I want to work in the different countries that need to improve their systems. I want to be active in areas like women's health or children's health or something similar. I would love to go to like the war zones but my mom won't let me, my mom's too scared. Like going to Syria or wherever, I would love to do that but you also got to be careful to as a woman.

4.4 Kausar

Kausar is a young, undergrad Muslim student. Kausar was born and raised in Canada and speaks English fluently and with Canadian accent. Her family is originally from Kurdistan in Iraq, and they immigrated to Canada many years ago. Kausar wears the hijab and is also quite into sports and plays rugby. As a second-generation immigrant, Kausar does not differentiate herself from any other Canadian. She stated:

Just because like I am Canadian born so I just kind of go with the flow and you know whatever is on my head I do not really notice it until somebody points it out to me. So I feel like I am like everybody else. I interact with non-Muslim and Muslims the same way and you know I get along with them really well and I can relate to them in many ways because I have the Canadian culture.

Kausar is very active in her academic role as a double major student and also in the extra-curricular activities around campus. In addition, she has been always very active in community services and volunteer activities. As she pointed out, what is important to her is not just making money, but offering services to others.

Kausar argued that the fact that she comes from different ethnicity and religion has positively affected her communication with other people from diverse backgrounds and the way they receive her. She believed that coming from a different ethnicity has impacted her behavior in a positive way. She stated:

Being from a different ethnicity I feel like I can connect with more people because I have that background but at the same time because I am born in Canada and raised in this culture I feel like I can also connect with Canadians. So I have very strong connections with immigrants, I have done a lot of work with immigrants. I have also done a lot of work with just Canadians and so having those two kinds of backgrounds is very helpful.

Kausar believed that her religion and field of study have helped her interact with people in a more positive and effective way. She asserted:

I am always careful to listen to people and be there for them and that is definitely a reflection of our religious beliefs and the way I conduct myself in public and around people. So religion wise I can connect with other people who believe in religions and because of my major, I know about them and so people really like that about me. When I speak to a Christian or a Jew I can tell them I know about their religion and they do not feel like they constantly have to educate me. It is I guess a change of pace for them so they get really excited and they feel like they can connect with me. So I do take a lot of time and effort to know about different people and to know where they are coming from. So it is easier to just communicate with them and it makes my experience so much better.

4.5 Karima

Karima is a young, Ph.D. student. She is a second-generation immigrant; she was born and raised in Canada. Karima believes that she has had a ‘very religious upbringing’.

Karima’s parents are originally from Pakistan; they immigrated to Canada many years ago. The parents are both well-educated and with university degrees. Although Karima’s mother is well educated and holds a university degree she has never worked (except in a part-time job, for a brief period of time), and chose to stay home and raise her children. However, according to Karima, she has been very involved in the community.

Karima has been wearing the hijab since the first year of her university education at 18 years old. In the family, even Karima’s mother did not wear the hijab until Karima’s sister decided to wear it at age 16. Karima was 5 years old at the time. Karima pointed out that when her sister decided

to wear the hijab, her mother decided to wear it too, to support her daughter's decision. Karima described the role her sister played in her decision to wear the hijab by stating that:

She (Karima's sister) was always my role model so she started wearing it and then I was like, 'Oh, that is because my Mom did not wear it,' but then my Mom started to wear it because my Mom wanted to support her. Yeah, because my Mom said, 'How can I tell her I support her decision and I know what she is going through and I'm not wearing it myself?' So I always find that interesting that she wore the hijab after my sister.

This definitely challenges the stereotypes that Muslim families are oppressive and force their daughters to wear the hijab. As it is clear from Karima's statements about her family that even her mother did not wear the hijab and did so because she wanted to support her daughter.

In her interview, Karima also talked about sexism and the fact that many Canadian women face domestic violence on a daily basis, or are sexually abused. She rightly pointed out that 'all women, regardless of culture or religious ethnic background, face discrimination and sexism'. However, when it comes to Muslim women, the same issue gets highlighted and tied back to Islam. Karima believed that:

This goes back to Orientalism and even earlier. The second day, they discovered Muslim women after they invaded Egypt and colonized Egypt and India and all of the other hundreds of countries they conquered, they suddenly discovered all these women who don't look like European women and therefore they're inferior and they must be oppressed. It's ingrained, I feel like it is truly ingrained in culture.

By talking about the colonial era, Karima attempted to address the relation between the hijab and colonial discourses in her argument. Several scholars have tried to answer the question of "when did the veil become a symbol of oppression" by tracing the first signs of the notion of the oppressive nature of the hijab back to the colonial era (see Ahmed, 1992, 2005; Bullock, 2002; Alvi et al., 2003; Rezai-Rashti, 1994). For example, Bullock (2002) points out that during the era of European colonization of the Middle East, Europeans 'were of one mind that Muslim women were oppressed by their culture' and therefore, '...the veil became shorthand for the entire degraded status of women, and the metaphor (or sign) of the degeneracy of the entire Middle

East (Orient) that fed off European culture's Orientalist view of the Middle East' (p. 1). Thus, according to Bullock (2002):

The notion that the veil is oppressive is an idea born out of domination, or, at least, the will to dominate. Any argument that advances the notion that the veil is a symbol of Muslim women's oppression draws, wittingly or unwittingly, from Orientalist and colonial discourse about the veil (p. 1).

I will provide a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the hijab and colonial discourses in Chapter 5.

4.6 Fausia

Fausia is a young, undergraduate student. She was born in the U.S. but raised in Egypt, before immigrating to Canada about 7 years ago, with her family. Her father is originally from Egypt and was raised in Cairo. He had his university education in the U.S. Her mother is a Muslim woman originally from Canada.

Fausia is very active and involved in charity and volunteer activities. She argued that by doing this, she wants to make Canadians realize that Muslim women are active agents in the society. Fausia has spent fairly even periods of her life in different countries and cultures. She has spent the first 6 years of her life in the U.S., the next 8 years in Egypt, and the recent 7 years in Canada. She believed that this experience has helped her become a stronger person. She explained:

You can probably tell from my background that my childhood was not that typical. I obviously experienced cultural shock from the States to Egypt and from Egypt to here and so I feel like these experiences really taught me that it is ok to stand up. I mean, when I was in the States, they used to call me princess Jasmine (referring to one of the famous Walt Disney's characters) because I was the only Arab at my school and then I moved to Egypt. I could not speak Arabic very well and I spoke English perfectly. They also were like wow... and then I moved to Canada; something like wow your English is amazing. So I always stood out and so I feel like I really learned to channel that. I am not afraid to

stand on my own and I feel like a lot of first generation Muslim girls are growing up that way.

As a second-generation immigrant in North America, Fausia speaks English fluently. She wears the hijab and has been doing so since she was 11 years old. Wearing the hijab has been her personal decision. About the impact of the hijab on her social life, Fausia explained:

Because I wear the hijab people do come to me and ask me questions but overall they have been polite and politically correct. I am very involved with the MSA (Muslim Students Association); I feel comfortable talking about my hijab and talking to people about it when I am approached I do not get awkward. I am ok with just answering questions.

4.7 Zahra

Zahra is a Ph.D. student originally from Iran. In 2011, Zahra came to Canada as an immigrant and settled in Montreal for about one year. She then returned to Iran and, after admission into the Ph.D. program, she came back to Canada along with her husband.

Zahra mentioned that she had a good life in Iran, but came to Canada to experience a better life. She believed that she can have a good life in Canada by saying ‘I chose Canada to live because no matter what kind of religion or race you carry you may have good life here’. Nonetheless, she has a strong tendency to preserve her cultural identity and heritage. She believed that ‘living in Canada does not mean that you have to change everything about yourself; it is not going to happen to me’. She stated:

This is the matter of changing your perspectives. When you enter this society you can be open to good ideas. You can have and respect your previous culture and tradition or you can change. You see? This is a matter of personal decision or choice actually.

Although Zahra does not wear the hijab, she has religious background and prays and recites Quran. She explained:

When I read Quran or pray I feel more comfortable and relaxed especially when I am tired or under stress. But it does not have anything to do with how I view other non-

Muslim women and people in general. I care about them, I respect them, and I want them to have the same respect for me.

Zahra does not wear the hijab, but she has mixed feelings about her decision. I will discuss Zahra's ambivalence towards wearing the hijab in the following chapter in more details.

4.8 Leila

Leila is a young Master's student. She is originally from Iran and immigrated to Canada with her husband about 16 months ago (at the time of interview). Her husband is also from Iran and holds university degrees.

Since the interview had to be conducted in English in order for it to get transcribed in a timely manner, and since Leila was new to Canada at the time of interview, she expressed concerns that she might not be able to communicate well in English. However, the fact that she is a graduate student made me believe she would be able to handle the interview in English, and as the interview progressed, I realized I was right in my assumption about her capacity to express herself in English.

Leila wears the hijab and, as she stated, she has received the worst reactions about her hijab not from the Canadian society, but, surprisingly, from the Iranian community in Canada. Since wearing the hijab in public places is mandatory in Iran for all women, many Iranians presume that Iranian women who wear the hijab while living overseas must be related to, and sponsored by the Iranian government. Thus, many Iranian people presume that an Iranian woman must have a good reason (such as the law, linkage to the Iranian government, etc.) for wearing the hijab, and this good reason can be anything other than the woman's own will and religious beliefs. Therefore, Leila received unfriendly reactions about her hijab from the Iranian community, as they automatically believed that she could not wear the hijab while living in Canada unless she or her family is linked to the Iranian government, a linkage that is not much liked by the majority secular Iranian people outside of Iran.

In response to my question about the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion, and the impact of the intersection on her experiences, Leila highlighted the issue of gender. She talked specifically about her challenges as a woman who has always felt the sexual gaze on her,

everywhere in Canadian society. Leila argued that although in western societies it is claimed that they have liberated all women and, therefore, western women do not have any problems, in her opinion, Canada is not much different from a society such as Iranian society in terms of its regulatory surveillance of women. Leila believed that the “sexual gaze” on women and its consequences to see women as “sexual tools” in Canadian society is so strong that it is difficult for her to feel secure in her interactions with her male peers even in the university environment. She argued:

They claim that we have just passed all the problems that we have in our country as women but I think here again is the same. Here I do not feel safe in my interactions with other males because I am a woman I do not feel safe and because of that I prefer to have my wedding ring always on. It gives me a kind of security and makes people keep a kind of distance from you. Because here I do not feel confident about my language I am afraid to say something inappropriate or they say something and I cannot understand the meaning. I do not know the exact meaning of some of their expressions. Sometimes, I feel that they are making fun of me.

I will discuss Leila’s viewpoints about male gaze and its relationship to the hijab in more detail in the following chapter.

4.9 Anisa

Anisa is a second-generation immigrant from a Muslim family originally from Pakistan. Anisa’s father and mother immigrated to Canada many years ago. Anisa was born and raised in a very multicultural neighborhood but moved to a quiet city after she got married.

Anisa does not wear the hijab. She said that since she does not wear the hijab, she has received considerable mixed reactions as people initially do not identify her as a Muslim woman, but often think that she is a Hindu from India. Therefore, she had to let them know that she is Muslim. Anisa described herself as ‘a fairly proud Muslim Pakistani girl who has always been into multicultural events in school, practicing during Ramadan, fasting, and all these kinds of things’. She described the role of religion in her personal life and personality as the same as what her parents consider for religion: ‘we are not extreme either way; we are just in the middle of the

row... middle class Pakistani Muslim people'. Anisa pointed out that this is the way her parents have raised her and her siblings.

Anisa's husband is also originally from Pakistan. After Anisa married her husband at the end of her Master's education, she decided to join him in Saudi Arabia where he lived at that time. Therefore, Anisa and her husband lived in Saudi Arabia for about two years and gained valuable experiences. In Saudi Arabia, Anisa worked as a teacher in an American private school. About that particular experience she stated:

When I decided to move to Saudi Arabia everybody was like 'are you sure? What do you want to do in Saudi Arabia? Women cannot drive there you must be veiled there when you are out? How are you going to live that life?' But I felt that I am going to learn and experience something new. At the same time, my husband was very understanding. He sent me lots of pictures from there, trying to reduce the cultural shock that I would experience. But I went with a very positive attitude. I believe that my experiences would be what I make of it so I have to go with an open mind. So I got married and I moved there and I lived there for about two years. I taught in an American private school.

Despite the common western stereotypes about Muslim families, suggesting that Muslim families do not value education for women, Anisa stated that her parental influence indeed forced her to pursue higher education. Anisa explained:

one thing that my parents get stressed always was that we came here for better life, stressing our cultural and religious values but also kind of stress on the fact that we want you to do well and always setting high aims in terms of education and employment ... 'you guys should really strive for the best'. That is kind of guided me and pushed me to first get my master and now still after getting married and having two kids going back to school.

In addition, as Anisa pointed out, higher education has always been surrounding her. Anisa's mother used to work in a university library and during summer time she would take her children including Anisa to her work place. Therefore, Anisa has spent a number of summers of her childhood in the library.

4.10 Jasmine

Jasmine is a young, Master's student who, according to herself, has always been involved in volunteer works. However, as she stated, she has been more involved academically than socially, having been more active in her classes and doing research with her professors.

Jasmine's parents are originally from Pakistan. Her father came to Canada when he was 17 years old, and returned to Pakistan a few years later and married Jasmine's mother (who was only 19 years old at the time). Thus, Jasmine's parents came to Canada at a young age and are now in their 60s.

Just before starting her university studies, Jasmine decided to wear the hijab. According to her, wearing the hijab was something she wanted to do for many years, but she did not have the confidence for such a transition. Jasmine's mother and her eldest sister do not wear the hijab. She also has a middle sister who has been wearing the hijab since the age of nine. Although Jasmine is very close to her middle sister, she did not think that the fact her sister wore the hijab motivated her to do the same. In this regard, Jasmine pointed out that: 'Maybe it could have been a reason subconsciously but I can wholeheartedly identify that it was not a contributing factor'.

According to Jasmine, she started embracing a lot more knowledge and practice of Islam when she was in grade nine. After she visited Pakistan the summer before grade nine, and was more observant to the practice of women in that country, she felt a need to dress more conservatively, and she increasingly felt inclined to wearing the hijab when she entered high school. However, the transition proved difficult for her and, as she pointed out, she 'did not know how not to wear it one day and the next day starting wearing that'. Finally, she decided to start wearing the hijab after finishing the high school, and she did so.

Unfortunately, Jasmine's mother who has been always supportive did not welcome her idea of wearing the hijab in view of the fact that the hijab is not considered modern in the Pakistani community. Jasmine's mother was also concerned about the fact that wearing the hijab would limit her options for a good marriage, as she believed that young men do not like girls who wear the hijab. As Jasmine pointed out, her 'biggest challenge with the hijab is if it is considered to be

desirable or not'. I will provide more detailed discussion about the hijab and its relationship to modernization in Chapter 5.

4.11 Summary

Chapter 4 introduced the participants in the study. Such an emphasis on the detailed introduction of the participants in any study is necessary for fulfilling the first step of data analysis, which is to gain a deep understanding of each of the participants. Therefore, in this chapter, the women whom I interviewed were introduced in detail, based on their own descriptions of themselves, their personal lives, families, beliefs, and ideas. Chapter 4 opened a discussion about one of the objectives of this research that is, highlighting the participants' different positionalities and their impact on their perception of the hijab. In this chapter, I discussed that the practice of veiling needs to be analyzed in light of such factors as those specific to the cultural and political contexts associated with the participants' countries of birth.

Chapter 5 focuses on a detailed discussion about findings and the themes that have emerged from the interviews.

Chapter 5

5. Findings of the Study

This chapter specifically deals with the findings of the study. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3 (Methodology and Methods), in this research, data analysis is based on ‘text analysis, describing information, and developing themes’ (Creswell, 2008, p. 33). When I initiated the process of data analysis, I realized that it had already started in my mind once I started the interviews, and was projected in my field notes. As recommended by Creswell (1998), I started with reading the interviews to get a general idea about the participants, and to build a holistic understanding of their views. Then, I continued reading the transcriptions, over and over again, to gain an in-depth understanding of every individual case. I highlighted important parts of each interview in different colors, to identify and develop different themes and categories (see Creswell, 1998).

Analysis of the data and the contents of each of the transcriptions resulted in the emergence of several themes, based on the theories of third-wave feminism, anti-racist feminism, and post-colonial feminism employed in this research as well as the available literature in this field. The themes include (1) the hijab and its significance; (2) multiple meanings of the hijab; (3) race, racism, and Othering; (4) Muslim women’s oppression; (5) Muslim identity- the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion; and (6) challenging the stereotypes. This chapter discusses the themes and the subcategories that substitute them. The discussion will be based on the theories employed for this research, and the reported literature in the field.

5.1 The Hijab and Its Significance

Several participants in this study highlighted the marginalization that veiled Muslim women face in Canadian society. It should be mentioned that most of the participants in this study are veiled (7 veiled participants versus 3 unveiled participants). Although both veiled and unveiled participants had, nonetheless, similar experiences of Canadian higher educational system, analyzing the contents of the transcriptions provided further insights and indicated that compared to the unveiled participants, those who chose to be veiled reported more overt incidences of

discriminatory behaviors on the part of their professors and peers in their universities. This finding is consistent with the existing literature in the field (for example, see Elnour, 2012; Zine, 2008). Although all of the participants of Elnour's study (2012) had experienced discrimination based on their religion, Islam, the experience of religious discrimination was harsher for those who wore the hijab. Several participants in Zine's study (2008) also pointed to their hijab and identified that as the 'most salient factor for discrimination' (p. 167). As Zine (2008) argues:

While these Muslim girls were socially located at the nexus of multiple sites of oppression based on their race, ethnicity, gender, and religion, they felt that their Islamic identity marked by their hijab, was the most salient factor of discrimination (p. 167).

One of the participants of my study, Fausia, who wears the hijab, emphasized the role of religion as the basis for marginalization. She believed that as a Muslim woman who wears the hijab, religion plays the most important role in constructing her experiences of marginalization. She argued:

I feel like because I wear the hijab, ethnicity and race does not really play a part because I am Muslim and it is around my head. You know what I mean? So I feel like I get judged based on my faith before I get judged based on my ethnicity.

In this way, Fausia emphasized the role of the veil in marking her as a visible member of Muslim community.

Considering the fact that clothing plays a significant role in any non-verbal communication (see Hoodfar, 2003), in western societies where, as Macdonald (2006) points out, 'ocular-centric or vision-based epistemology' (p. 7) is privileged, the preoccupation with images of veiled Muslim women and fixation on the hijab is expected. Therefore, the hijab as a 'flag' (Meshal, 2003, p. 93) marks Muslim women as the "Other". As Neider (2009) argues:

Muslim women face close scrutiny in societies where their group is the minority, which becomes more pointed when they choose to wear traditional dresses. Choosing to veil and wear traditional dress often challenges the strength of their identity (p. 9).

In a study by Sirin and Fine (2008) about Muslim youths in the U.S., the researchers concluded that compared to Muslim men, who are relatively less visible, those Muslim women who wear the veil, experience more discrimination. This is because of the visibility that wearing the veil brings for Muslim women and marks them as members of the Muslim community.

Jasmine, who wears the hijab, referred to this visibility as well and noted that sometimes in class discussions, non-Muslim students who did not wish to offend her as a visible member of Muslim community felt nervous to bring up Muslims related topics. According to Jasmine, this is because they regarded her as a symbol of Muslim identity. She stated:

I feel sometimes wearing the hijab gives some people an anxiety to ask questions about Muslims or bring up topics. I know when we are talking about Muslim related topics in class, sometimes, people are nervous because they don't want to offend me. Even if I'm quiet, I haven't shown any strong personality in any of my classes but for me, I know that they see me as a symbol of an Islamic identity, which is largely misconstrued by popular images in mainstream media.

Fatima highlighted the difficulties that many veiled Muslim women face in integrating into Canadian society. She argued that compared to veiled Muslim women who have 'extra hurdle to get over' Muslim men can more conveniently integrate into Canadian society and asserted:

My class is about eight Muslim people; two are girls and the rest are guys. Definitely I can see that the males are more integrated than the females because it is so much easier to go and do what they do because you are not readily identifiable as a Muslim. So they will still come and invite you out to things and they won't just assume things about you, right? But as Muslim women we have always that extra hurdle to get over, right, because wherever we go the first thing they are going to know even before they know our name or anything is what we identify with and they are going to add whatever stereotypes they have to that.

Fatima's argument is pronounced in the works of several scholars. For example, in their study, Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) argue that while Islamophobia was discussed by the participants in gender-blind ways, many of them believed that the way Muslim men and women experience

Islamophobia is different. These participants believed that veiled Muslim women are more vulnerable to Islamophobia because of the visibility that the practice of veiling brings for them. Hamzeh (2011) argues that many Muslim women have to deal and live what Hamzeh calls 'hijabophobia- a gendering discourse hidden within Islamophobia' (p. 484). Similarly, Zine (2006a) argues that 'for girls who adhere to Islamic dress codes, such as the hijab or headscarf, the visibility mark them as Muslims, issues of ethno-religious oppression in the form of Islamophobia are particularly salient' (p. 239).

The saliency of the hijab for the study participants eventually contributed to the formation of the first theme of the research discussed here as "the hijab and its significance". This finding is consistent with the reported literature in the field which have discussed the challenges associated with wearing the hijab and the marginalization that veiled Muslim women experience in society at large (Bullock, 2002; Elnour, 2012; Hamdani, 2004; Mc Cue, 2008; Meshal, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2008), in educational settings and college campuses (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Jandali, 2012; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Speck, 1997; Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 1999; Ruby, 2006; Zine, 2008), and in their work place (Elnour, 2012; Siann & Clark, 1992; Hamdani, 2004; Parker-Jenkins et al., 1999; Parker-Jenkins, 1999; Keung, 2002; Smith, 2002).

For example, in Meshal's (2003, p. 93) study, 34 percent of the veiled participants had experienced discrimination at work, 63 percent with their non-Muslim peers, and 39 percent with their professors. Meshal explained that although the discriminatory behaviors reported by the veiled participants might have been related to other differentiation markers such as race, ethnicity, and accent, as opposed to the hijab, almost half of the participants (47 percent) reported the rise of the discriminatory behaviors upon their adoption of the hijab. Meshal concluded that despite the fact that it is difficult to relate the reported discrimination solely to the hijab, 'there is no denying that the sight of the hijab can stoke such bigotry' (p. 95). Bullock (2002) demonstrated the discrimination that veiled Muslim women experience in Toronto 'based upon the way they dress' (p. 84). Participants in Cole's and Ahmadi's study (2003) highlighted the hostility that they experienced on campus and attributed that to their appearance as veiled Muslim students. Similarly, the findings of Seggie and Sanford's study (2010) revealed that

although veiled female Muslim students experience a rather welcoming campus, ‘they still experience feelings of mild exclusion and marginalization’ (p. 59).

The significance of the hijab in the lives and identities of almost all of the participants in this study was so prominent that it affected the contents of almost all of the data gathered for the research. It is also pronounced more strongly in other themes of the research especially the themes “race, racism, and Othering” and “Muslim identity- the intersection of gender, race, religion, and ethnicity”. Thus, in the rest of this chapter, where applicable, I will highlight the significance of the hijab and its impact on the experiences of the veiled study participants.

5.2 Multiple Meanings of the Hijab

One of the significant finding of the study is the multiple meanings that the participants associated with the hijab. Considering the heterogeneity of the Muslim women’s lives and identities in Diaspora, this finding was expected. Each of the participants had a unique perception about the hijab and wearing the veil, which reflects their unique and different positionalities. The participants’ unique perceptions about the hijab emphasize the need to analyze the cultural, political, historical, and geographical influences at play in the practice of veiling. Despite this fact, the monocular representation of Islam and Muslims projected in most western scholarly works conveys the notion of a static society of Muslims, and overlooks the diversity of Muslim women and their voices (see Mohanty, 1991, 2003). As Honarbin-Holiday (2013) pointed out:

It is a vastly misunderstood and neglected fact that although Islam has a unified source, it is also fluid and giving, capable of multiple interpretations which often take the color and texture of the locale , and project complex perspectives (p. 2).

The multiple meanings that the participants in this study associated with the hijab also clearly challenge the colonialist constructions of veiled Muslim women as oppressed, Othered, and subjugated by the Islamic patriarchy. This has been echoed by several scholars (Alvi et al., 2003; Bullock, 2000, 2002; Hoodfar, 1993, 2003; McDonough, 2003; Rezai-Rashti, 1999; Ruby, 2006; Zine, 2006a, 2007), who provide nuanced analyses of the experiences of Muslim women and the veil. These scholars have highlighted the significance of women’s resistance and agency in

questioning the one-dimensional treatment of veiling as a symbol of Islamic oppression. As Hoodfar (2003) argued:

While the veil was invented and perpetuated within a patriarchal framework as a means of controlling women, more often than not women have appropriated this same artifact to loosen the bonds of patriarchy (p. 39).

Based on Hoodfar (2003), overlooking the different meanings associated with the veil by different women in different social contexts clearly projects western society's tendency to deny Muslim women's agency, and view all of them as passive, choiceless, and oppressed by Islamic patriarchy. Hoodfar (1993, 2003) also discussed that many Muslim women choose to wear the hijab not just because of their religious beliefs, but to resist and highlight the presence of the Muslim community in Diaspora. Hoodfar (1993) argued that:

Since the veil, in Canadian society, is the most significant visible symbol of Muslim identity, many Muslim women have taken up the veil not only from personal conviction but to assert the identity and existence of a confident Muslim community and demand fuller social and political recognition (p. 15).

In a Post-Gulf War study on Muslim community in Canada (1992-1997), Hoodfar (2003) introduced "Self-assertion" as one of the coping strategies used by many Muslim women. She argued that since clothing is a powerful means for non-verbal communication, many Muslim women in Canada choose veiling to demonstrate their frustration of Canadian society and resist the stereotypes. According to Hoodfar (2003), the wider western society's response to this self-assertion has been a 'more extreme stereotyping of Muslims' (p. XII). Hoodfar (2003) added that Muslim women who choose veiling as a means for self-assertion feel somehow uncomfortable, despite the fact that they live 'in a postmodern society where differences are expected to be tolerated, if not understood and celebrated' (p. XII).

Erasing the voices of Muslim women from the dominant discourses about the meaning of the hijab has the same nature as excluding women's perspectives and voices from the mainstream discourses (Bullock, 2002), the same factor that has stimulated the emergence of different waves of feminism. To illustrate the need for echoing the voices of Muslim women in any discourse

about the practice of veiling, Bullock (2002) has referred to Dorothy Smith, who has argued that ‘the remedy is to take women’s experience into account so that the balance can be achieved and women’s perspectives and experiences can be presented equally with men’s’ (p. 37).

It should be mentioned that, at the first glance, the multiple meanings associated with the hijab and identified by the participants in this study looked different. A closer look at the transcriptions, however, revealed the commonalities between the participants’ viewpoints about the hijab, which enabled me to identify four subcategories for this theme: (1) the hijab as a message, (2) the hijab as a feminist strategy, (3) the hijab as a religious requirement, and (4) the hijab as a non-essential component of Muslim women identity. These subcategories are discussed in the following sections.

5.2.1 The Hijab as a Message

Consistent with the findings of studies on Muslim women and the hijab (Hoodfar, 2003; Nasser, 1999; Ruby, 2006) which highlight the hijab as a public statement and message by Muslim women that they refrain from certain behaviors, some of the participants in this study also regarded the hijab as a message. These participants believed that the hijab makes a statement that its wearer is a Muslim woman and, therefore, does not engage in certain behaviors such as drinking and dating. One of the participants in the study, Fausia, explained her views about the hijab as a message and as a lifestyle and stated:

When people see it (the hijab) they know that I don’t drink; I don’t smoke; I don’t date; I don’t mind working with men. I have to do a lot of work with guys but I always make things like a professional boundaries. My body is not your property; I have control over it; my parents do not, I do. The hijab is more than just the cloth on my head; it is the whole way that I live my life. It is the way that you present yourself to the society. It is modesty and humanity. It is the way that you hold yourself to be the best role model for your society.

Similar to Fausia’s viewpoint, participants in several studies on Muslim women have identified the theme “taking control over women’s lives and bodies” as an important meaning associated with the hijab. For example, some of the participants in Ruby’s (2006) study viewed the hijab as

a means to set boundaries between themselves and the outside world. Leila viewed the hijab in the exact same way. In her interview, she indicated that the hijab has given her the ability to take control over her body. As Leila pointed out:

The hijab for me is something inner; it is much more than a piece of cloth; it shows my attitudes to speak to other people that I am a Muslim woman, I have my boundaries and nobody can cross my boundaries. If you want every time to voice this it is much more difficult but with your hijab you can easily say to other people to keep their distance.

Earning more respect by the way women dress and trying not to be objectified was also mentioned by a number of the participants. For example, Fatima, who believed that objectifying a woman is disgusting, stated that when a woman dresses in a certain way, the way men respond to this situation is disgusting. Fatima concluded that the hijab does a good job of letting women be who they can be and speak their mind.

Kausar had a similar opinion about the hijab. It was crucial to both Fatima and Kausar not to sexualize and present themselves as a sexual object. They strongly believed that in this way, they were able to earn the respect and value that they needed as Muslim women in their interactions with other people. Kausar stated that some people might disagree with this view and might argue that women should be allowed to express their sexualities in any way they wish. But she believed that a woman who chooses to show her body gets looked down by other people. According to Kausar:

Veiling is something that helps me gain respect from others and show them that I do not want to show off my sexuality to you. That is something private to me and to the people that I love. So all you see is what you need to see, my face and my hands, that is it, you know. Then whatever else comes from me is my thoughts, my opinions, my ideas and that's all you need from me, you do not need anything else. You do not need to look at me in that way.

This is consistent with the findings of some studies (for example, see McDonough, 2003; Hu et al., 2009). Participants in a study conducted by Hu et al., (2009) believed that the veiling practice allows women to be more accepted by other people for their intelligence, and not only for their

sexual attractions. One of the participants in McDonough's study (2003) asserted that she wished to be judged for her intellect and not for her dress. This participant stated that by wearing the hijab, she would be able to protect herself 'from the eyes of certain kinds of men who look at women as an object of desire' (p. 111).

Fausia talked about a non-Muslim girl whom she had recently met. According to Fausia, the girl had told her that she absolutely loved the symbolism of the hijab and the idea behind it conveying the message that the wearer of the hijab does not want her beauty to be exposed to everybody. Fausia explained that this had inspired the girl to start dressing more modestly, and believed that in the era when there is so much commercialization of women and their beauty, women feel the need to be covered more than ever before.

Some of the participants in Bullock's (2002) study found wearing the hijab to be a liberating experience. Bullock (2002) explains that this view is consistent with 'the feminist critique of the commodification of women's body in capitalist society' (p. 72). The liberating effect of the hijab from the male gaze, and the role that the hijab can play to protect women from a sexist society have also been highlighted in several studies (for example, see Bullock, 2002; Hoodfar, 1993, Khan, 1995b; McDonough, 2003; Oden, 1993, Ruby, 2006, Siraj, 2011; Zine, 2007). The findings of these studies indicate that the hijab provides women with more comfort to move freely in public. Despite the fact that the voices of women in these studies, as well as mine, confirm the prevalence of this view amongst many Muslim women, some scholars (for example, see El Saadawi, 1980; Mernissi, 1987, 1991b) believe that the hijab is indeed a means to physically and psychologically control women in a male dominated society and, therefore, should be condemned.

5.2.2 The Hijab as a Feminist Strategy

Two of the participants, Mica and Kausar, talked about their beliefs about the hijab as being an ultimate form of feminism. The hijab as a feminist gesture is highlighted by Ahmed (2005), who identified three distinct meanings or master-narratives for the hijab. Ahmed believes that these master-narratives have prevailed following 'the first attack on the veil conceived from within the bosom of colonialism' (p. 160). According to her, the first master-narrative regards the veil as the symbol of inferiority of the Islamic Other. According to her, this narrative has emerged from

‘the white man’s moral obligation to dominate, change, and civilize’ (p. 160). The second master-narrative regards unveiling as a commitment to the project of modernity, which has also been discussed by Bullock (2002) through reference to the modernization theory. Finally, the third master-narrative, according to Ahmed is what can be found quite popular amongst young American Muslim women nowadays—it has emerged as the Islamic response to the second master-narrative and regards the practice of veiling as a deeply feminist gesture.

A number of the participants in this study perceived the hijab as a feminist strategy. For example, Mica and Kusar viewed the hijab as an ultimate form of feminism. Kausar argued:

My hijab is the ultimate form of feminism; it is like to say that I don’t have to look like those girls on T.V. and what’s in my brain is what matters. I believe that women’s sexuality is very, very powerful and so the hijab is to say that I am not that sexual person that is perceived in the society and I do not want men to look at me in that kind of way. Yeah it took me a while to kind of learn that and really understand the hijab. But once I did, it made so much sense and it made me a stronger individual for sure. It made me way stronger in my opinions and the way I speak to people, the way I even just conduct myself as a person.

Although Mica, similar to Kausar, viewed the hijab as a feminist strategy, she believed that western feminism cannot speak for her. In her opinion, the reason had its roots in the fact that western feminists look at her and other veiled Muslim women as being oppressed by the Islamic patriarchy. Mica believed that it is very ignorant to regard a Muslim woman as oppressed just because she has chosen to be veiled and argued that in a free country, and as a feminist gesture, a woman can choose to dress in whatever ways she wishes, and the hijab must not be regarded as a sign of oppression. She stated:

I identify with feminism. I believe that a woman can dress whatever she wants. So my freedom and my choice is a right for me. So how I express myself is what I choose to do and I feel like if people see me as being oppressed or silent then it is their own ignorance. I believe that western feminism do not speak for me because western feminists think that wearing the hijab makes me oppressed. This is a very ignorant opinion.

The fact that western feminism cannot speak for Mica, as a Muslim woman, is directly discussed by Third-World feminists and those from Muslim countries (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Ahmed, 1992; Alvi et al., 2003; Bullock, 2000; Haddad et al., 2006; Hoodfar, 1993; Khan, 2000, 2002; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Moallem, 2005; Najmabadi, 1991; Rezai-Rashti, 1999, 2005; Zine, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). For example, Rezai-Rashti (1999) has pointed out that ‘while much can be learned from Western feminism, it is important to realize that it is just one version of feminism and cannot be forced upon every minority woman’ (p. 152).

Referring to the colonial legacy of feminism in the Middle East in devaluing local cultures, Ahmed (1992) introduced “colonial feminism”, rejected the notion of universality of western feminism, and questioned its appropriateness for making sense of all women’s experiences.

5.2.3 The Hijab as a Religious Requirement

The hijab as a religious requirement or obligation is mentioned by a number of the participants in this study. This notion is highlighted in several studies (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Hoodfar, 2003; Meshal, 2003; Siraj, 2011). For example, Cole and Ahmadi (2003) highlight the isolation and alienation that a number of their study participants felt on campus. However, according to Cole and Ahmadi, they did not take off their hijab despite the isolation and alienation because of their hijab. This is because they believed that the hijab is a religious requirement. Veiling practice, as a part of the religion, and wishing to be a good Muslim woman, are mentioned by majority of participants in Hoodfar’s study (see Hoodfar, 2003). Similarly, 81 percent of the participants in another study (Meshal, 2003) indicated that they have chosen to be veiled just because of purely religious motives.

Similar to the findings of the studies mentioned above, a number of the participants in this study viewed the hijab as a religious requirement. For example, Karima viewed the hijab the same way and argued that women and men are ordered in the hadith⁵ and Quran to cover themselves. She pointed to the fact that although the Quran first orders men to cover themselves and lower their gaze and then orders women to cover themselves, people typically leave the first part out and

⁵According to Oxford Dictionary, Hadith is ‘a collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad that, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Koran’.

mainly highlight the second part. Karima believed that since the hijab is a religious requirement, she must wear it.

Jasmine talked about submission as a fundamental principle of Islam, and believed that since she wears the hijab in the name of Allah, it cannot be challenged. She argued that:

My belief in terms of wearing the hijab is that regardless of what it says in the Quran and whatever people interpret and practice, my understanding is that when we want to present ourselves to Allah and stand up to pray, we veil. That is why I veil. That is why I feel that it is necessary for me.

Kausar also believed that the hijab is a religious obligation and her decision to wear it has truly been one of her best decisions, giving her a better opportunity to connect to God. Although the veil as a gaze inhibitor presented in Islamic discourses has great popularity amongst many Muslim women, scholars such as Zine (2006a) argue that this notion is similar in nature to the secular readings of the veil, which view the hijab as oppressive. Zine believed that this is because both paradigms make women obey specific patriarchal demands. She provides a nuanced analysis of the way the veil is represented in Islamic ideology as a means to protect women from the male gaze. Although this notion has contributed to the saliency of the practice of veiling amongst many Muslim women, as evident in the existing literature in the field and also in the responses of a number of participants in this study, Zine believed that this notion has put a great responsibility on the shoulders of Muslim women to cover and protect themselves from men's sexual attention instead of asking men to be responsible for their own sexual behavior. Consequently, Zine identified two 'equally reductive paradigms' (p. 244), namely; 'conservative Islamic discourses', which view the veil as a religious obligation for Muslim women and 'secular readings of the veil', which view the veil as the universal symbol of Muslim women's oppression. Therefore, Zine argued that Muslim women must navigate between these two 'reductionist and essentialized paradigms' (p. 244) to claim their own choices. Zine concluded that 'whether the intent is to exhibit women's bodies in order to satiate the male gaze or to cover women's bodies in order to inhibit male desire, both realities force women to cater to specific patriarchal demands' (p. 249).

5.2.4 The Hijab as a Non-Essential Component of Muslim Women Identity

Only three out of the 10 participants in this study did not wear the hijab. Two of the three women who did not wear the hijab believed that it is not a necessary component in defining a Muslim woman. Highlighting the hijab as a non-essential component of Muslim women identity by these women led me to the construction of the forth subcategory for the theme “the Multiple meanings of the hijab”. This notion is discussed by a number of scholars (for example, see Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; El Saadawi, 1980; Clark, 2003; Mernissi, 1991a; Siraj, 2011; Zine, 2008).

Mernissi (1991a) highlights the multidimensional nature of the hijab by discussing the three hijabs—visual hijab, spatial hijab, and ethical hijab. Through utilizing classical Islamic tools of research, Mernissi deconstructs the meanings of these three hijabs in the Quran and Hadith and argues that the hijab is not limited to the visual hijab, that is, what is exercised by Muslim women through covering their heads. According to Mernissi, the hijab also encompasses a larger meaning, referring to invisible forms of the ethical and spatial hijabs. In addition, she discusses the way the canonical Arabic dictionary has limited the meaning of the hijab solely to the visual hijab, and disregarded the non-visual, spatial, and ethical hijabs. Therefore, through controlling language, according to Mernissi, the hijab has turned to an unchallengeable notion and a genderizing discourse, which has affected and controlled Muslim women’s lives for so long.

In addition, Mernissi (1991a) identifies the fourth hijab—the spiritual hijab—which is addressed in the Quran as the spiritual separation from knowledge. Mernissi states that the spiritual hijab is a ‘negative phenomenon, a disturbance, a disability’ (p. 95); indeed, this is what Muslims should cross in order to know God and Quran more deeply. According to Mernissi, another important factor contributing to the construction of a genderizing discourse is obscuring the spiritual hijab in favor of the visual hijab. Further, Mernissi discusses how male scholars’ androcentric interpretations of the hijab-related verses in Quran have led to the fixation of the visual hijab to control Muslim women’s bodies.

Although not wearing the hijab, all three unveiled participants in this study dressed modestly and reported they felt more comfortable without the hijab. For example, Anisa believed that the hijab is not a necessary component of a Muslim woman and stated:

I think my decision about the hijab is pretty much informed by my parents who do not see the hijab as a necessary component of being a good Muslim woman and I feel the same way. I believe that a good Muslim woman should have many more essential qualities than just being veiled.

Similarly, Zahra believed that Muslim women's modesty in action and thought is much more representative and impressive than wearing the hijab or being completely covered and (sometimes) being evil and dirty inside. It should be mentioned that Zahra came from a country where the hijab is mandatory for women in public places (Iran), and had a unique perception of the hijab.

Considering the multidimensional nature of the hijab discussed at the outset of this section through Mernissi's work, Zahra's explanation about the hijab makes sense. According to Zahra, Muslim women should not solely exercise physical hijab (visual hijab) by covering their heads with headscarves and ignore the non-visual hijabs (spatial and ethical) which are equally important.

Zine (2008) discussed Muslim women's choices not to wear the hijab from a critical faith-centered viewpoint, and believed that not wearing the hijab should not invalidate their identities as Muslims. According to her, 'to invalidate their identity in this way reinforces narrow, deterministic perceptions that Islam can be reduced to an article of clothing' (p. 172). A critical faith-centered view advocates for considering a broader spectrum of religious practices 'which may or may not include practices such as veiling' (p. 172). A number of participants in Cole and Ahmadi's (2003) study argued that they could still practice modesty even without the hijab. This group of women decided to take off their hijabs due to the negative experiences of wearing the hijab on campus. Similarly, while half of the participants in Siraj's study (2011) strongly believed in the necessity of exercising modesty by Muslim women, they viewed the hijab as 'an unnecessary piece of clothing' (p. 716). Siraj also pointed out that a number of participants who did not wear the hijab believed that it 'locates and locks women into a submissive and secondary position' (p. 728).

As several scholars have argued (see Alvi et al., 2003; Hoodfar, 2003; Bullock, 2002), in order to analyze the underlying reasons for taking up or giving up the hijab, different social, cultural,

historical, and political factors must be considered. Overlooking the impacts of various factors and identifying the religious factor as the sole and only factor responsible for wearing or not wearing the hijab is a strategic mistake. In my research, even though Zahra and Anisa's viewpoints about the hijab looked similar at the first glance, I have tried to highlight their differences in light of their own political, cultural, and historical contexts associated with their countries of birth. I believe that these women have represented two different mindsets rooted in two very different socio-cultural backgrounds, which I try to analyze in the following lines.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Zahra does not wear the hijab, but she has mixed feelings about her decision. Although Zahra does not wear the hijab herself she envies other veiled Muslim women who are not forced to wear the hijab and points out: 'There are many Canadian Muslim women who wear the hijab; they go to the mosque to pray and I really enjoy seeing them. I just envy them. They stick to their own beliefs. How about us? How about me?' Not wearing the hijab has made her feel that, as a Muslim woman, she lacks something. She states: 'you just feel that as a Muslim woman you lack something'.

Zahra is still seeking the true reasons behind her decision. Her confusion and her struggles to find the reasons behind her decision are clear when she asserts:

I am Muslim, but why I am not wearing the hijab? What is the problem? This is a problem rooted in my own country. You are a Muslim. Then you have to know the true meaning of the hijab and why it is useful to wear the hijab. Wearing the hijab should not be by force. Whenever we were at school or workplaces we were forced to wear the hijab and this forcing, let's say, impeded us from having a very clear thought about that.

In addition, it looks that Zahra's decision to not wear the hijab is not final as she states, 'I have come to a free country. In this country everything is based on democracy. So this democratic life should allow me to have my hijab as it should be. But still it is not like that'. Then she adds: 'I do not know, perhaps in two or more years you will see me wearing the hijab'.

As evident in Zahra's interview, the political and social climate in Iran can be one of the significant factors contributing to her ambivalence toward wearing the hijab. After Iranian revolution in 1979, wearing the hijab by all women in public places became mandatory by law

and the state made it clear for women that violations of this rule might lead to severe consequences. Therefore, while many Iranian women did not view the hijab as an essential component for Muslim women identities, they still had to wear it in public places.

There are many Iranian Muslim women who, similar to Zahra, have religious upbringing and tendencies. At the same time, however, they do not want to wear the hijab, just to prove their agencies and to highlight the fact that they have freedom of choice. If this group of women, including Zahra ever have a chance to live for a sufficiently long time in a country like Canada where people are free to have their personal choices, they will gradually revert to their faith and start wearing the hijab. Although Zahra is not there yet, as she pointed out, she might start wearing the hijab sometimes in the future, when she feels more ready.

Considering Zahra's specific social, geographical, and political backgrounds, her perception about the hijab as a non-essential component to define a Muslim woman is expected. However, the situation in Pakistan has been very different. Three out of four Pakistani Muslim women whom I interviewed, namely; Karima, Afifa, and Jasmine, directly talked about modernization in Pakistan and the fact that the hijab in Pakistani society is not considered modern enough to be exercised by young educated women. All four Pakistani Muslim women in this study stated that their mother (i.e., representative of the old generation in Pakistan) did not wear the hijab. For example, Afifa stated that her mother and aunts wore the *bourqa*⁶ when they were young, in the 1970's, but they stopped wearing it due to the modernization. Similarly, Karima's mother did not wear the hijab until Karima's sister decided to wear it, and her mother started to wear the hijab just to support her daughter. Karima also talked about one of her friends whose family was not supportive of their daughter's decision to wear the veil. According to Karima, the father viewed the hijab as a barrier that could hold back his daughters. Jasmine, another participant of Pakistani origin and her older sister wear the hijab, whereas their mother and the middle sister do not. Jasmine pointed out that her mother, who has always been very supportive, did not welcome the idea when Jasmine decided to wear the hijab. As Jasmine explained, 'in the Pakistani community the hijab is not necessarily celebrated because it is not considered to be modern'.

⁶ According to Oxford Dictionary, a *Bourqa* is 'a long, loose garment covering the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by many Muslim women'.

Similar to the Pakistani participants in my study, a Pakistani participant in Cayer's (1996) study highlighted the association of the hijab and backwardness amongst most upper- and middle-class Pakistani families. This participant stated that viewing the hijab as a sign of backwardness made her husband not being supportive when she started wearing the hijab.

Several scholars (for example, see Bullock, 2002; Ahmed, 2005) have discussed modernization theory and its roots in the Orientalist and colonial discourses about the hijab. As Bullock (2002) has pointed out, it was after the World War II that Orientalism transformed into modernization theory (neo-Orientalism). This approach, which is based on the assumption that the western style of life is superior, suggests that Muslims have to adopt a western style of life in order to progress and catch up with the west. Therefore, in this approach, it is believed that unveiling is essential to the modernization of Muslim countries. According to Bullock (2002), in the colonial era, the upper-class native Muslim elites, who were mostly educated in the west and had internalized the Orientalist views of Islam and Muslims, became convinced that Muslims are backward. This group, which accepted the oppressive nature of the veil, viewed the disappearance of the veil as an essential step for the "modernization" of their countries.

Hoodfar (2003) highlighted another aspect of modernizing and westernizing in some Islamic societies, which is the association of unveiling and education for Muslim women and asserted that this has resulted in 'the combination of unveiling and education in one package'. According to Hoodfar, this aspect is rooted in 'the elites' awareness of the way in which the veil had emerged as a symbol of the backwardness of their society in the west' (p. 9).

However, as Bullock (2002) pointed out 'Muslim objections to the hijab now revolve around issues of class, marriage, and beauty' (p. 67). Therefore, Muslim families who consider the hijab unattractive do not like their daughters to be veiled just because they believe that this would narrow their daughters' chances for good marriage. One of the participant in my study, Jasmine, indicated that their parents disliked her and her older sister's decision to take up the veil because they thought this would limit their daughters' chances to get married. A number of the participants in Cayer's study (1996) also mentioned the same reason in explaining why they had decided not to wear the veil.

5.3 Race, Racism, Othering

The issues of race, racism, and Othering turned out to be salient in almost all of the interviews. Although none of the participants believed that they had experienced direct racism in their respective universities, all of them acknowledged the fact that racism exists in Canadian educational system and society at large. Several of the participants recalled different events that had happened to them or to their relatives and friends, and believed that they were evidences of the existence of racism in the Canadian society.

A number of the participants pointed to the sense of Othering that they had felt in their interactions with the majority white non-Muslim students. The term “Othering” has a very distinct definition in the postcolonial literature. Ashcroft et al., (1995) describe the term Othering coined by Spivak as ‘a process by which the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes’ (p. 158). They also explain ‘the process by which imperial discourse creates its Others’ (p. 156). Different markers of differentiation such as racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural can be used as the basis for the stigmatization and marginalization of an “Other”. The binary thinking hidden in the term Othering contributes to the marginalization and exclusion of “them” who are “inferior” and different from “superior us”.

As mentioned earlier in the section of “the hijab and its significance”, compared to the unveiled participants in this study, those who chose to wear the veil reported more overt incidences of discriminatory behaviors from their professors’ and peers’ in their respective universities. This is consistent with the existing literature in the field (see Asmar et al., 2004; Bullock, 2002; Elnour, 2012; Hamdani, 2004; Mc Cue, 2008; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Meshal, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Speck, 1997; Tyrer & Ahmed, 2006; Parker-Jenkins, 1999; Keung, 2002; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 1999; Smith, 2002; Zine, 2001). These studies highlight the importance of the hijab as a signifier of Muslim identity and its potential as a basis of discrimination and racism. As evident in the definition of racism provided by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), racism can use all kinks of signifiers and markers to differentiate and dominate, including the hijab. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) define racism as:

A set of postulates, images, and practices which serve to differentiate and dominate. This can use all kind of signifiers and markers. They serve to deny full participation in

economic, social, political, and cultural life by the essence that they posit. The supposed essence of difference is given a negative evaluation (p. 15).

Amongst the participants in my study, Karima, who wears the hijab, experienced the most blatant incidence of racial prejudices. She explained her experience with one of the professors and his prejudices about Islam. According to Karima, the professor seemed very friendly and understanding at first, and he even once expressed his respect to Karima's hijab, but later started making fun of Karima for her religious beliefs, insulting the hijab, and mocking Karima's faith to her face. Karima stated that 'he insulted Islam and Prophet Muhammad all the time'; he even once sent an email to Karima asking her to 'take off the tea towel', in reference to Karima's headscarf. The professor's attitude towards Islam and Muslims, and his destructive behavior, were so disturbing and stressful to Karima that her marks dropped in that particular course. However, as Karima pointed out, that particular experience indeed empowered her; it made her much more determined as an educator to not ever do what the professor did to other Muslim students.

Kausar, who also wears the hijab, pointed to people's prejudice when they first meet her and explained:

There is a little bit of prejudice at first when people meet me and they just go so shocked when I say 'I play rugby or you know I do other things' and they are just like 'oh my gosh like that is really cool. It is kind of weird because look at the way you are dressed'.

Fatima, another participant who wears the hijab, regarded herself as the only visible Muslim in her "international business" class and talked about an incident in that class, which she believed clearly indicated the professor's misconceptions about Islam. Misconceptions and prejudices of professors and peers about Islam are highlighted as one of the most important challenges of Muslim students in American universities (See Speck, 1997). Although Fatima was really disturbed by the experience, she decided not to report the event to the university authorities, which handled issues related to discrimination. However, in the class, she actively challenged the professor and his biased ideas about Islam, and also sent him an email to indicate that she would be happy to provide him with a translation of Quran for further discussion. Fatima explained the situation:

The professor was talking about how you have to be prepared when you are having a business in another country to respect the cultural values of that country and also understand that they may do things different than you. For example, if I was in Saudi Arabia I would not give my car keys to a woman and tell her to go buy something for me because I know that she cannot drive. Then he looks at me, I was the only visible Muslim, and he is like ‘oh, the Quran is pretty forward thinking. Isn’t it? 1400 years ago for whoever wrote it to say that women cannot drive it is pretty forward thinking’. Then I told him ‘nowhere in the Quran does it say that; they did not even have cars 1400 years ago, I do not even know where you are coming up with that’ and he is like ‘oh, of course it says’.

Fatima’s challenges in her class is reflected in Speck’s (1997) study who highlighted religious prejudices that many Muslim students experience in American university classrooms. He identified four problems of professors including ‘(1) professors’ misunderstanding of Muslim practices, which may result in misrepresenting them in the classroom; (2) professors may use media that introduce misunderstanding about Islam; (3) professors may fail to maintain attitudes of respect for certain religions in the classroom; and (4) professors may not make an effort to accommodate students’ religious practices’ (p. 40). Speck invites university professors to recognize diversity in their classrooms and eliminate any biases that they might have about different religions.

Being under pressure to constantly explain and defend Islamic religious values and Muslim’s viewpoints to non-Muslim members of the class is highlighted by participants in several studies (for example, see Horwedel, 2006; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Both Horwedel (2006) and Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) discuss the fact that the misconceptions about Islam and Muslims fueled by the media make many Muslim students and professors engage in informing and educating non-Muslims about their faith, that is, about Islam and Islamic practices. Horwedel (2006) has argued that while some Muslims get overwhelmed by the burden to represent all Muslim communities (similar to some of the participants in Nasir and Al-Amin’s study), others are thrilled to take the opportunity to educate non-Muslims and to correct their distorted perceptions about Islam. As I will discuss in section “challenging the stereotypes”, although a number of the participants in my

study were quite engaged in educating non-Muslims about Islam and Islamic beliefs, none of them complained about the burden.

Jasmine, another veiled participant of my study, stated that there were moments in her classes that she felt her classmates were quite ignorant, based on their comments and class participations. According to Jasmine, her classmates, who were mostly non-Muslim and many of them not from the greater Toronto Area (GTA), were not prepared to address the needs of their future clients properly. For example, in one of her classes on the subject of approaching a client when she/he walks in, the discussion was about the appropriateness of shaking the clients' hand upon meeting him/her. According to Jasmine, even though no one directly mentioned Muslim women and the fact that they do not hand shake with men, it was evident that Jasmine's classmates were talking about Muslim women. Most of them believed that 'When you are in a country like Canada you should pick up the norms and if that is how it is here then that is how you should be and if you do not like the way it is here, you should go back where you came from'.

In addition, Jasmine explained that she had noticed her classmates' discomfort whenever issues such as 'racism, the racialization of certain population, white privilege, or certain policies that are in favor of Anglo-Saxon British French came up in any of her classes'. This finding is in line with the findings of several studies, which have highlighted incidences of discrimination and prejudice in university settings (for example, see Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Asmar et al., 2004; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Mc Cue, 2008; Muhtaseb, 2007; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Speck, 1997, Stubbs & Sallee, 2013) and in American society at large (Elnour, 2012). For example, in a study of young Muslim first- and second-generation immigrants in the U.S., Sirin and Fine (2008) found that, in the course of a year, 88 percent of the participants between the ages of 18 and 25 had reported being subjects of discrimination, based on their religion, Islam. In addition, 13 percent of the participants reported that they had experienced discrimination on a daily basis. Further, the participants identified their schools as the primarily place for them to experience discrimination.

Jasmine also highlighted her feelings of being Othered in her interactions with majority white non-Muslim students in the university where she works. She works with art and design students

and professors in a university campus where the majority of students are white. Jasmine mentioned that her colleagues were very friendly, but, unfortunately she did not have the same impression about the students. Jasmine believed that she is invisible to the students and explained:

Especially when I go to the washroom and other girls are there and I am fixing my scarf. Just the way they look at me is like I am “Othered”. The gaze is very powerful and my mom always assumes that I'm misinterpreting it. But, you know, they do look at me like I'm an “Other” and I am an “Other” in front of them because there is a very artsy community on campus because it is an art and design school. So I am an “Other” and I do stand out.

A feeling of being “Othered” was also mentioned by Leila, who wears the hijab. She felt that in her communications with white people, they always look down at her. She pointed out that ‘in communication with white people everything is polite in the first place but you always feel that you are being looked down. If you do not work on yourself it can ruin your self- confidence’.

Karima talked about her challenges being a Muslim woman studying the white dominated field of visual arts. She mentioned that she has had to explain herself, her religious beliefs as a Muslim woman, and the fact that she was not able to draw a nude model in Ramadan. According to Karima, one of her professors in the second year of her study challenged her by implying that she ‘should either be a western student or a Muslim as the two are mutually exclusive’. However, the Dean recommended that the professor accommodate Karima and let her draw a clothed model instead of a nude one.

Mica recalled an incident in which two intoxicated white men had expressed racial slurs to her father. According to Mica, her father is a visibly Muslim man; he has a beard and an accent, wears Jellabia, which is a white modest dress for Muslim men, and prays in the Mosque quite often. When Mica’s father called the police, the men said ‘you are just an immigrant and you are calling my police on us’? What really offended Mica was the fact that when the police officer came, ‘rather than acknowledging the whole racist situation that they were in, he said: I always say to my three-year old daughter if somebody says something mean to you just walk away’.

Mica believed that her father ‘experiences more racism that she does’, since he grows a beard and wears Jellabia and looks like a typical immigrant.

Mica talked about the existence of racism in universities and pointed to the fact that in some incidences, racist speakers have been invited to the university. She added that she and other Muslim students protested to the university officials that ‘the speakers are racist and Islamophobic, and the students did not want them invited’. Unfortunately, according to Mica, many such speakers were still allowed to make a speech at the university.

Kausar believed that racism definitely exists and is prevalent in the Canadian society, but she has chosen to ignore it, as she did not want to think that every person she is walking by is judging her. Although Kausar believed that she has never been discriminated against in any way in the university, she admitted that there are people with racist tendencies in the university. In her interview, Kausar mentioned a face-book forum in her university, on which people could express their opinions about different issues anonymously. She stated that this forum has been a major eye-opener to her, as it has helped her realize that there are many stereotypes and racism towards Muslim women. Kausar explained:

If it was not for this forum or knowing about these opinions, I would never have thought otherwise, I never would have thought that some people think of me as I’m being oppressed or stuff like that. People even say things like ‘I cannot believe that there are so many Muslims on campus like where are they all coming from’. It is like some sort of epidemic or something like they are upset about it. Like where are all these Muslims coming from, like they are everywhere now, what are we going to do with them? I have seen these comments before.

Jasmine believed that she has not experienced racism in her university, since the campus is so diverse and many of the students are Muslim. However, she argued that she might have experienced racism had she socialized more. Mica and Leila pointed that they had also heard from their friends about the existence of racism.

A number of the participants stated that they had racist experiences such as calling names in elementary school, middle school, and high school and in the Canadian society in general, but

not in the university. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 4, Fausia talked about her experience of being called Princess Jasmine (referring to one of the famous characters of Walt Disney cartoons) in the elementary school, as she was the only Arab girl there. Karima also was called blackie when she was in the elementary school. She remembered one of her classmates from the time when she was eight years old. Karima stated:

There was one girl who was very racist. Her Mom was very tanned, like she goes to a tanning salon all the time to get tanned and I remember her Mom worked at a convenience store. That is how I knew what her Mom looked like. I'd see her all the time at that store because it was right near my house. And I remember one day seeing her Mom and I'm thinking in my head, "Her Mom is even darker than I am. Why is she so racist to me?" I was eight so this is how a kid's mind works so, "Why is she so racist to me when her Mom is like making her skin even darker than mine," and I still sometimes look back on that and I am like, "Was that a really naive thought or was that a really intelligent thought?" I do not know; I was only eight. It was just funny because I remember thinking her Mom is tanning to be darker than me and yet she is the most racist kid in the class.

For Zahra, who does not wear the hijab, the issue of race was more prominent than religion. Amongst various markers of differentiation that could be used as the basis for discrimination and racism, she chose to highlight race instead of religion. She argued that her race is hidden (since she has fair skin and, therefore, it is difficult to guess her race) unless she talks, at which point the differences show up and people's reactions change. She stated:

About the race, as long as I do not talk or I do not speak this difference between native or non-native speaker is not really pronounced. When I start to speak to other native speakers it is natural that my speech and my fluency actually affect the way they treat me.

Zahra believed that her accent can influence the way Canadian people treat her. Mica also brought up the issue of accent and related it to the white privilege to see accent as a major flaw. She stated that her white friends who travel as tourists to countries such as Mexico or Nicaragua do not feel any pressure by the fact that they speak very little Spanish, and have English accent in their Spanish. Mica believed that this clearly shows the white privilege.

Several studies on minority women have highlighted accent discrimination and the way it can result in women's marginalization (Elnour, 2012; Hong, 2008). For example, in a research studying "the intersection of race, gender, and religion in the educational and career experiences of immigrant professional Sudanese Muslim women in the United States" Elnour (2012) has pointed to "accented English" as a source of discrimination and prejudice reported by the study participants. The study has also identified race, gender, and religion as other important markers of discrimination and prejudice. Another study on "highly skilled Korean immigrant women in the Canadian labor market" has identified "accent discrimination" as an important reason for minority women's subordination (Hong, 2008).

Afifa believed that although racism exists in the Canadian society, it is very difficult to trace. She attributed this to the fact that in Canada, everything is hidden and covert. Afifa, who like Zahra, does not wear the hijab, highlighted ethnicity as a more prominent basis for racism and acknowledged the fact that racism based on ethnicity had also existed in her country, but she never felt that before coming to Canada. She argued:

Things like racism also exist in my own country. But I never acknowledged that because I was in a privileged class, like when people make fun of other ethnic groups. There are certain names for people putting them down; all negative things mostly. So that is racism and we were laughing at that because we were not recognizing that we were kind of putting them in lower position but here everything changes we are in that side we are not privileged anymore.

In addition, Afifa talked about the consequences of racism and suggested that people targeted by this kind of discrimination must be cautious not to internalize the sense of inferiority conveyed by the message. She argued:

It depends on the person. I think I can confront that does not upset me. I won't feel bad about myself. I do not know because it is about my study whatever I wear whatever I am its mine it is me and I am proud of it. Like I wear my dress; I cook my food and everything and if somebody make fun of my way of life it is his or her problem. But some people can get very depressed or have a kind of inferiority complex.

Zahra also explained her sense of being “Othered” and stated:

Sometimes when I face them (white non-Muslim people), I ask myself what is the reason for their reaction like this? Is this because they are Canadian or because I am foreigner or because I am not speaking like a native speaker? What is the reason?

She specifically recalled an experience with two other male white students in one of her classes that, she believed revealed their biases. She referred to those classmates as being ‘very, very biased about their own language, English, and about being Canadian’. Zahra continued: ‘I just think that they look down at us’.

According to Zahra, one of the two students openly believed that Canadians are people who are born in Canada. Therefore, Zahra stated, even someone like her nephew who has been in Canada since the age of one month and has received her formal educations in Canada is not a Canadian. According to Zahra, the professor tried to convince the two students that their attitude is not healthy and should be revisited, but it seemed to Zahra that they were not convinced. The response of the other one to the professor proved Zahra’s opinion, he responded ‘yes, I am Canadian and I am biased. Yes, I am biased’.

To further elaborate on the existence of racism and discrimination, several of the participants pointed to the feelings of exclusion and invisibility in their interactions with the majority white non-Muslim students and staff in their respective universities. Therefore, “exclusion and invisibility” emerged as the subcategory of the theme “race, racism, and Othering”, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.1 Exclusion and Invisibility

A number of the participants reported their experiences of exclusion and invisibility in their interactions with the majority white non-Muslim students and faculty. Here, again, the hijab played a significant role in constructing the experiences of the Muslim women who participated in the research. In other words, the feelings of exclusion and invisibility were mentioned mostly by the veiled participants. This finding is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Asmar et al. (2004), which highlights feelings of exclusion and alienation from campus drinking culture amongst the veiled participants in that study.

Compared to the veiled participants in my study, the experiences of exclusion amongst unveiled participants were light and scarce. For example, when Zahra, who does not wear the hijab, wanted to elaborate on the feeling of exclusion in campus, she referred to one of her veiled friends and her experience of exclusion from one of her classes. Zahra attributed the reason for this feeling to the students' and professor's ignorance. Zahra's friend had been late by about 5 minutes for one of her classes. When she came in to the classroom, the chairs had all been taken. However, nobody paid any attention, and she ended up standing for about 10 minutes. Finally, a male fellow student offered her a chair and somehow resolved the issue. According to Zahra, her friend was offended by the fact that she was actually excluded from the class, and nobody, including the professor, cared about her. According to Zahra, one explanation, or 'just an excuse for the students' ignorance', could be that the students were attending to the professor's lecture and did not notice the situation. However, the explanation that made more sense to Zahra was that her friend, a visible Muslim woman wearing the hijab, had been simply excluded from that particular class by the students and the professor.

In contrast to Zahra, the feeling of exclusion seemed very prominent to Fatima, who wears the hijab. She specifically talked about her experience of being excluded from one of her cardiology classes. According to Fatima, the professor would normally address and look at every single person in the group. However, he never addressed Fatima in the class; whenever Fatima had a question, the professor first chuckled and then answered very briefly. Fatima also recalled that she once walked with the professor to another place and tried to initiate a conversation. Thus, she asked whether the professor had graduated from the medical school of the same university. According to Fatima, the professor responded with a brief 'NO' and kept walking. This situation felt awkward to Fatima and made her feel excluded from that particular class; it also made her lose interest in participating and learning from that particular professor.

In addition, Fatima talked about being excluded by not getting invited to class gatherings involving drinking. She explained her feelings of exclusion:

Because I do not go to bars and I do not drink in that sense you are excluded. Like you are not considered one of them which is not a good feeling but then you think I do not want to be around people who are drinking all of the time.

Jasmine stated that she has lost a number of her non-Muslim friends consequent to her decision to wear the hijab. According to Jasmine, many of her high-school friends, who happened to attend the same university, stopped being her friend as they thought Jasmine had become 'too conservative' by wearing the hijab. Jasmine stated:

Although I did not change as a person from high school to university but my hijab became a very big barrier for them; and maybe because they also wanted to go to pub nights on campus and they felt that if I was not coming along they attributed it to the hijab. But I would not have come along even if I was not wearing the hijab because that is not my scene and it has nothing to do with the hijab.

In addition to the feeling of exclusion discussed above, a number of the veiled participants highlighted a feeling of invisibility caused by the ignorance of the majority white non-Muslim students. These participants talked about feelings of being ignored and invisible by using different terms and context. It should be mentioned that none of the unveiled participants reported feeling invisible.

For example, Fatima and Leila, who are both veiled, explained feelings of invisibility, which they thought were because white students try to ignore them. It seemed to Fatima that this invisibility and the fact that 'a lot of white students do not approach her' were due to the fact that they do not have time for her, or they may have 'their own personal prejudices about Muslim women. She explained:

There is a certain group of people mostly minorities that will talk to you but a lot of the majority they do not have time for you, they are like on their own and yeah it is something you just grow up to deal with. But for me it was a little hard because I grew up in Toronto where the majority of people are really friendly and nice; they are used to having people from different cultures. Whereas, here they are not just used to it and so I think some of it comes out of ignorance like they just do not know how to deal with that.

Fatima recalled an experience she had with a male classmate, who had come to sit beside her in the classroom. According to Fatima, since she wanted to be nice, she had given him a smile. However, in response, she received something that Fatima describes as a 'stone cold look, with

no smile, no nothing'. Later on Fatima found out that the male classmate had dual Israeli-American citizenship which could somehow explain his reaction, maybe mixed with some hostility. Fatima continued:

So I know that was probably because he has his own prejudices against me as a visible Muslim wearing the hijab and that is why he did that. Sometimes I do not know it is really difficult to deal with that. I just did not acknowledge it, I just left it alone but it was kind of weird to see.

This finding is consistent with the findings of several studies (For example, see Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Asmar et al., 2004; Basford, 2008; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Feelings of isolation amongst Muslim students have been discussed by both Ali and Bagheri (2009) and Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) who highlight anti-Muslim sentiments in university classrooms and the hostile environment of university campuses as factors responsible for the feelings of isolation. Nasir and Al-Amin believe that 'hostile environment' of university campuses can affect Muslim students negatively, and push them 'to distance themselves emotionally' from 'that particular campus community' and, sometimes, from 'school in general' (p. 25). In addition to academic, racial, cultural, and religious discrimination, participants in Basford's study (2008) reported experiencing invisibility and being unwelcomed in their schools.

In addition to the feelings of exclusion and invisibility experienced by the participants in my research, discussed above, a number of the participants stated that it is difficult to befriend, or to continue friendship, with the majority white students. These participants believed that immigrant or international students are much more approachable and easier to get along with. For example, Leila talked specifically about her experiences as a volunteer in a museum that made her believe that white Caucasian people distance themselves, whereas immigrant people are much more welcoming and approachable in their communication and friendship. She explained:

I was working with a group of young Canadian girls, amongst them there was only one Indian-Canadian girl and she was the only one that I could make some kind of friendship. The others kept their distance with me completely.

To further explain this Leila continued:

Canadian white people usually want to keep their distance, I did not get any direct reaction but it is something that you can feel, some kind of unkindness. At the first glance, everything is polite; on the surface everything is nice and good but you cannot trust their friendship.

Leila mentioned that, in her relationship with Canadian white students, she often felt that nothing about her and her life, except her food, is important to them; they did not want to know anything about her. She argued:

I think Canadian people are not interested in you and your life; you feel that everything about you is not important for them. When you come here you want to know about the culture, history, everything. But they are not curious about you. You have to come here and obey the rules and obey the culture but for them it is not important that what you are; what you think; or what your culture is. They are just interested to your food and that is it. They just want you to come here and work for them. Sometimes I think that we are just their workers and nothing more.

This finding is consistent with the findings of a number of studies on Muslim students (for example, see McDermott-Levy, 2011; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Zine, 2001), and international students (McLachlan & Justice, 2009; Brown, 2009). Participants in McDermott-Levy's study (2011) found it easier to befriend non-Caucasian students. Further, they felt rejection from their white American classmates even though they were trying hard to interact with them. 'Isolationist attitudes' (p. 412) amongst Muslim students, who have been victims of their peers' discriminatory attitudes, are highlighted by Zine (2001). Zine gave the example of one Muslim immigrant high school student who stated to her that 'it was easier to just be with your own kind' (p. 412).

Friendship and the challenges of establishing friendships with the host students are highlighted by participants in two different studies conducted on international students in two different contexts. The first study is conducted by Brown (2009) in England and the second by McLachlan and Justice (2009) in the United States. Although many international students who participated in these studies were fully aware of the importance of establishing friendship with the host students in order to become familiar with the culture and language, participants in both studies confessed

their failure to do so. Inapproachability of British students as members of the host community and their lack of interest in international students were mentioned by the participants in Brown's study as barriers to this interaction. In addition, in some cases, Muslim participants in Brown's study attributed the problem to Islamophobia and racial prejudices of their British peers. To elaborate on the perceived Islamophobia and racism Brown referred to the experiences of one of the veiled participants who 'was verbally and physically attacked in the street' (p. 448).

Similarly, many of the participants in McLachan and Justice's study (2009) claimed that they had more international friends and those from their countries. Eighty five percent of the participants believed that befriending American students was a 'slow and, at times, a frustrating process', whereas international students befriend 'sooner and more spontaneously' (p. 30).

It should be noted that participants in my study provided different reasons for feelings of invisibility and exclusion that Muslim women might experience in Canadian universities. For example, Afifa pointed to the fact that 'she does not have close friendship with white Canadians but is very close to international students'. She attributed this to 'cultural differences' and believed that there is 'some kind of gap or distance between the cultures', and her inability to establish and continue friendships with white students is probably due to her inability to properly understand their cultural values. She has also referred to the issues of 'white supremacy' and 'colonization' and to their impacts on her relationships with white students. She has realized that 'cultural differences' might not alone be enough to explain 'a very complex problem' and stated that the mentality that whites are superior hinders the development of a healthy relationship.

Zahra has also talked about the 'cultural gap' and the fact that it is more pronounced in her relationships with white Canadian students. Zahra asserted that she is very comfortable in her relationship with one of her Chinese friends and attributed this closeness to some common cultural commonalities which have helped them connect easily. She has been unable to find such cultural common grounds with majority white fellow students.

Kausar, Zahra, Afifa, and Leila referred to white students' lack of knowledge about, and interest in other cultures. The phrase 'they do not know anything about us' was common to all of the four interviews. Leila believed that some people even 'do not want to know anything about other

cultures’, and referred to the negative reactions that she sometimes receives from people outside of the university. She pointed out:

I think that most of them do not know anything about you, your culture, and your country; they think that you live in a desert with camels around; you do not have any cars or any technology so they always think that they have to teach you something. My brother has lived for 15 years in the United States. When he comes back to Iran for a visit he takes pictures from everywhere to show them to his colleagues because they think that we do not have anything in Iran.

Several participants, like Leila, believed that people are prone to revisit their biased attitudes and misconceptions about other people if they are provided with correct information. Lack of information about people from different races is highlighted by Sleeter (2005), who identified two approaches to racism, including psychological and structural. Each approach suggests different ways of addressing and solving the issue of racism. According to Sleeter, psychological views about racism are based on the assumption that racism lies mainly in biased individual actions, and stems from prejudiced attitudes, stereotypes, and lack of information about people. Therefore, it is believed that educating people about other races can be an effective way of fighting racism. In other words, people can eliminate their prejudices and misperceptions about other races through education.

On the other hand, instead of focusing on what is in people’s heads and trying to correct it through education, structural analysis focuses on distribution of power and wealth across groups, and the way one group tries to retain supremacy while the other tries to challenge it. This approach views racism as a structural arrangement among racial groups. Therefore, in this approach, it is believed that education will not result in any less racist institutions (Sleeter, 2005).

I will elaborate on these notions, particularly the role of education in helping people overcome their biased behaviors, later in this Chapter when I discuss the theme “challenging the stereotypes”.

5.4 Muslim Women's Oppression

Almost all of the participants in this study reported being treated and perceived differentially by the majority white non-Muslim students and faculty based on the negative reductive stereotypes about Muslim women prevailing in Canadian universities. Amongst different stereotypes identified and discussed by the participants, there were two that were highlighted and emphasized the most, namely; “Muslim women as oppressed” and “Muslim women as forced to be veiled”. All of the participants used these two phrases to discuss the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities, which portray a homogenous universalized picture of all Muslim women as being oppressed by Islamic patriarchy.

In addition to the two stereotypes of “Muslim women as oppressed” and “Muslim women as forced to be veiled” identified by the participants in my study and discussed above, there are other stereotypes highlighted by them. The exact words and phrases quoted by the participants to explain the negative stereotypes about Muslim women prevailing in Canadian universities are “forced to get married”, “veiled”, “having no choice”, “needed to be saved”, “not athletic”, “quiet”, “polite”, “not kind”, “not smart”, “having no brain”, “controlled by men”, “not educated”, “barbaric”, “weak”, “not socially active”, “timid”, “told what to do”, “having no freedom”, “submissive”, “staying at home”, and “sitting in the back”. Needless to say, each of these words or phrases has a negative connotation and portrays Muslim women as a backward and oppressed “Other” and, definitely not progressive or intelligent. As is clear from the meaning of these stereotypes, they are not mutually exclusive but are interconnected and share common negative meanings.

To better illustrate these stereotypes and their weight and significance to the participants, I created a wordle, shown in the Figure 1 below, in which different fonts and colors symbolically indicate the significance of each of the words or phrases used by the participants. It should be noted that a wordle is a powerful tool to visually represent raw data. The significance of each of the words or phrases is determined by the frequency of their use by the participants.



Figure 1: Stereotypes about Muslim Women Identified by the Participants

This finding is consistent with the findings of Nasir and Al-Amin's (2006) study in which the participants constantly thought that other people judged them based on the prevailing stereotypes about Muslims. The participants in that study believed that the 'identity management process' (p.

25), that, according to the researchers, refers to constant correction of other peoples' impressions of Muslims, had a negative impact on their academic achievements. They believed that the time and energy that they spent for this process could be devoted to their studies in the university.

Further, the participants in my study highlighted the hijab as an important signifier of Muslim women's oppression in Canadian higher educational system. In other words, they believed that many white non-Muslim Canadian students regard the hijab as the most important symbol of Muslim women's oppression.

The hijab as a signifier of Muslim women's oppression is highlighted by several scholars (Ahmed, 1992; Mahmood, 2005; Bullock, 2002; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2009; Moallem, 2005; Zine, 2002; 2006a). These scholars have discussed that amongst different Islamic practices, the practice of veiling, as the most visible practice of Islam, has turned to be a strong signifier of the Islamic oppressive treatments of women in western societies. Ahmed (1992) describes the veiling practice from western points of view as 'the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies' and 'the symbol of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and backwardness of Islam' (p. 152). Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008) discussed 'how discourses about veiling have functioned to confirm particular beliefs or Orientalist truths about Muslim women's oppression and, more generally, Islam' (p. 419).

Zine (2006a) identifies 'gendered Islamophobia' as a specific form of 'ethno-religious and racialized discrimination' against Muslim women in western societies, which has its roots in 'Orientalist representations that cast colonial Muslim women as backward, oppressed victims of misogynist societies' (p. 240). Gendered Islamophobia discussed by Zine (2006a) is also highlighted in other studies (for example, see Mirza, 2013; Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006). Mirza (2013) points to gendered Islamophobic discrimination against Muslim women and argues that 'Muslim woman wearing the veil has preoccupied the media and face openly hostile reactions in a climate of State sanctioned gendered Islamophobic discrimination' (p. 6).

The perceived oppressive nature of the hijab in Canadian universities has its roots in the majority non-Muslim Canadian students' liberal belief that Muslim women are forced to be veiled, with no other choice. Therefore, they are oppressed and in need of rescue. This is highlighted by

several participants in my study. These participants believed that this perception of the hijab puts extra pressure on the shoulders of Muslim female students who decide to practice veiling as a way of life. As Hoodfar (1993) argues, ‘the assumption that the veil equals ignorance and oppression has meant that young Muslim women have to invest a considerable amount of energy in establishing themselves as thinking, rationale, literate students/persons, both in their classrooms and outside’ (p. 5).

Several studies have challenged the reductive stereotypes about Muslim women prevailing in western societies. For example, through an extensive exploration of Iranian Muslim women’s life experiences, Honarbin-Holiday (2013) has challenged the ‘simplifications and trivialization of the Other’ (p. 7) prevailing in western countries. As an Iranian woman herself living in the west, Honarbin-Holiday takes the reader ‘on a journey to spaces of transition and continuity, and contradiction and paradox- to homes where male relatives are challenged, and in classrooms, parks, metros, taxis and cafes where social and political debates persist and women speak their minds’ (p. xii).

Through this, Honarbin-Holiday (2013) directly challenges the notion of Muslim women as passive objects in their social and personal lives prevalent in western societies, and carefully demonstrates that Muslim Iranian women are visibly active in almost all aspects of their personal and social lives. She states that:

Equipped with increasing self-knowledge and self-confidence through education, they (Iranian women) have engaged in a battle of ideas with passion and dynamic methodologies, aiming to effect cultural change, reform in the legal system and a more developed democracy which safeguards women’s rights as well as men’s (p. xi).

Hoodfar (1993) also challenges the stereotypes about veiled Muslim women. Highlighting the lived experiences of veiled Muslim women as well as their agencies, she notes that ‘the static colonial image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman thus often contrasts sharply with women’s lived experience of veiling. To deny this is also to deny Muslim women their agency’ (p. 5).

It should be noted that in my research, the participants who chose to wear the hijab demonstrated strong opinions about their hijab. This is expected considering that these women had directly felt and experienced colonial gazes on them as visible members of the Muslim community in Diaspora. They carefully elaborated on the perceived oppressive nature of the hijab in western societies, and challenged that notion by voicing their perceptions against it. For example, both Karima and Fatima pointed out that many white non-Muslim people believe that veiled Muslim women are oppressed, since they have no choice and are forced to wear the hijab. They discussed that if this is the basis for the conclusion that veiled Muslim women are oppressed, then forcing Muslim women not to wear the hijab is also oppression. According to Karima and Fatima, obviously this approach makes no room for women to exercise their democratic rights, something that is currently happening in Quebec. Fatima and Karima's nuanced analysis provided the same reasoning that the other party uses to justify the claim that all veiled Muslim women are oppressed. As Karima argued:

We choose to wear the hijab and we are considered oppressed and not fitting into Canadian society. If we choose to wear it then we are oppressed and we should be saved from it. But if they force me not to wear that they do not want me to have a choice again and the only choice they want me to have is to not wear it but then that's still oppression.

Fatima talked about the Quebec Charter of Rights and stated:

This is the one thing that keeps boggling mind because they say that Muslim women are oppressed and controlled by their men and that is why they wear their hijab but what the government is trying to do with the Charter is the exact same thing, they are trying to force them to do the opposite and forcing people is not right.

Disciplining women's bodies through enforcing or banning the hijab by the State, highlighted by a number of participants in this study and mentioned above, is also discussed by several scholars (for example, see Ahmed, 1992; Bullock, 2002; Zine, 2006a). Bullock (2002) brought the example of countries such as Iran, where women are forced by the State to wear the hijab and added to this picture 'the campaign against the veil' (p. 32) initiated in western societies. By referring to Ahmed (1992), Bullock (2002) explained that the campaign against the veil is not initiated by women and neither was it 'initiated in the name of women's choice. Rather, it was

part of elite men's (and then women's) attempt to fashion a new modern state' (p. 32). Therefore, Bullock (2002) concluded that 'to veil or not to veil is manipulated for the State ends, and women's choice has little to do with it' (p. 32).

Zine (2006a) highlighted the regulatory practices on Muslim women's bodies in some Islamic societies through illustrating the effects of 'the vicissitudes of patriarchal social rules on the one hand, and secularist reforms on the other' (p. 244). According to Zine:

Whether the veil and burqa is a mandated form of dress for women in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan, or if it is outlawed in secular public institutions in countries like Turkey, the effect is essentially the same; namely that these practices of disciplining and regulating women's bodies are imposed by State authorities and, thereby, challenge the political and spiritual autonomy of Muslim women to make reasoned choices about their bodies (p. 244).

In addition, in my study several participants highlighted the stereotype of being "veiled" as one of the most prevalent about Muslim women in Canadian society. This is because western societies associate the practice of veiling specifically with Muslim societies. However, exploring available historical knowledge on the practice of veiling (see Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008) demonstrates that the way veiling is perceived and represented in the west is highly contaminated with myths and misunderstandings.

Historically informed knowledge about the hijab reveals that the practice of veiling has never been limited to Muslim communities. Practicing modesty, especially through clothing, has historically existed in different communities (Macdonald, 2006; Hoodfar, 2003). As Hoodfar (1993) has pointed out, the practice of veiling can be traced back to pre-Islamic era and 'originated in non-Arab Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies' (p. 6). Hoodfar explained that historically, the practice of veiling 'was a sign of status and was practiced by the elite in the ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine Empires' (p. 6). Despite this fact, today, the practice of veiling is attributed to Islam and viewed as an Islamic practice imposed by the Quran. However, there is no explicit recommendation in the Quran for women to wear the hijab (Macdonald, 2006; Ahmed, 1992; Hajjaji-Jarrah, 2003; Hasan, 1994; Mernissi, 1987, 1991b) and 'the Quranic injunction for both men and women is for modesty' (Macdonald, 2006,

p. 8). As Ahmed (1992) pointed out, the only verses that explicitly deal with the issue of women's clothing 'instruct women to guard their private parts and throw a scarf over their bosoms' (Sura 24:31-32) (p. 55). Therefore, as Macdonald argued, '... veiling neither originated in, nor is unique to, Islam' (p. 8). Despite the facts just mentioned above, there is still a tendency in western societies to associate the hijab with Muslims and Muslim women's oppression.

In addition to identifying the most prevalent stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities, the women whom I interviewed criticized the prevailing tendencies in western societies to homogenize Muslim women and erase the cultural, historical, political, and geographical specificities of Muslim women's lives. These women tried to highlight the differences that exist amongst Muslim women. This concept is discussed below as a subcategory for the theme "Muslim Women's Oppression".

5.4.1 Highlighting the Heterogeneities of Muslim Women's lives and Identities

A number of the participants in my research expressed strong objections about generalizing and universalizing comments that portray all Muslim women as oppressed particularly by the virtue of being veiled. These women challenged the notion of essentialized and homogenized Muslim women, presented by the colonial and Orientalist views of Islam and Muslims, as all being oppressed by Islamic patriarchy (see Mohanty, 2003, 1991; Rezai-Rashti, 1994).

For example, Jasmine argued that it is not right 'to paintbrush over all girls who wear the hijab'. Jasmine emphasized Muslim women's positionalities and the need to analyze the specific location of Muslim women from different countries and explained that 'just because you knew one girl that was forced to wear the hijab, it does not mean that we are all forced to wear it and just because many women wear the hijab does not mean that everybody is the same'.

Similarly, a number of the participants in Tyrer and Ahmad's study (2006) argued that in view of the heterogeneity of Muslim women and their identities, there is no single way to categorize them and their experiences. Sirin and Fine (2008) also discussed that generalizations about any group of people is problematic as they can overlook intergroup variations. Thus, they concluded that problems arise when generalizing accounts categorize Muslims, who are highly diversified and from many different cultural, historical, and geographical contexts.

Karima challenged the prevailing stereotype that Muslim women are forced to be veiled by referring to her experiences with many veiled Muslim women. She observed that over the past ten years, she had met at least 100 veiled Muslim women through the MSA (Muslim Students Association) and never came across anybody who had been forced to wear the hijab. She explained that ‘some girls have worn it and then taken it off. Some have wavered but all of the girls I’ve talked to - students, friends of mine, older women - they all did it by choice’.

She also challenged the stereotype that Muslim women are controlled and pushed by their fathers or brothers to be veiled. To support her opinion, Karima gave the example of her Muslim friend who decided to wear the veil despite her father’s disagreement. According to Karima, her friend’s father strongly believed that, ‘there is nowhere in Islam that says you have to wear it’.

This is in line with the findings of various studies that have highlighted Muslim women’s free choice to wear the veil (for example, see Hoodfar, 2003; Bullock, 2002; Peek, 2003). Amongst these studies, Peek (2003) demonstrated Muslim female students’ agency to stay veiled despite unsafe campus’ atmosphere immediately after 9/11. According to Peek, immediately after September 11, many of the participants in Peek’s study were asked to remove their hijab by their parents who were concerned about their daughters’ safety on campus. Although a number of the participants eventually gave up their hijab, others decided to continue veiling despite their families’ strong requests that they remove them. Hoodfar (2003) also pointed to one ‘very unexpected finding’ (p. 15) from her study, that many participants in her study had to fight their parents for them to allow them to wear the hijab. Hoodfar explained:

...While some mothers felt powerless to deny their daughters’ decisions to veil, they themselves did not associate veiling with Islam. Other parents reluctantly accepted their daughters’ decisions and continued to hope that the young women would ‘come to their senses’ and give up the veil. Two fathers after failing to convince their daughters not to veil, refused to talk to them for several months (p. 15).

Bullock (2002) highlighted the fact that Muslim women who decide to practice veiling against their families’ wishes have to engage in a ‘dual battle’ (p. 71). According to Bullock, these women have to deal with the negative impacts of the greater Canadian society’s reaction in public, and of their families from whom they need the most support.

Karima and Fausia directly pointed to the prevailing stereotypes about oppressed veiled Muslim women who need to be saved, and expressed that they ‘do not need to be saved’. Karima stated:

I do not need to be saved from anyone. I am perfectly fine, thank you. I would rather you dealt with discrimination and actual problems. I do not want to be saved by someone else. If I was a Muslim who was going through a problem, I could go to someone in my community and they could help me because they would understand. There are a lot of really great imams⁷ out there who I know I could go to. So that's the thing. We do not want intervention. I want support and that is the big difference.

Fausia talked about her experiences with people who feel an urgent need to save her. According to Fausia, these people come to her and ask ‘did your father made you wear it?’ and every time she has to explain that ‘no, my parents try to make me a lot of things; they can never get me to do anything. They have no control over how I dress whatsoever’. She believed that these people have good intentions and genuinely want to help. However, they are encouraged by western media to believe the stereotypes. Similarly, Jasmine, who also wears the hijab, pointed out that she constantly has to clarify to others that her father has nothing to do with her hijab.

As mentioned earlier, all of the participants in this study asserted that white non-Muslim Canadians perceive Muslim women as oppressed. They also mentioned the hijab’s association with Muslim women oppression. However, several of them identified other stereotypes to explain Muslim women’s oppression in the eyes of the majority non-Muslim Canadians. By referring to these stereotypes, in fact, the participants highlighted the Orientalist perceptions of Muslim women that view them as extremely oppressed by the Islamic patriarchy. This erases Muslim women’s cultural, political, historical, and geographical differences and depicts quite a distorted image of Muslim women’s lives and identities in western societies.

For example, Fausia asserted that making people realize that she is not ‘an oppressed quiet Muslim woman’ had been one of her main challenges, especially during the first and second years of her university education. She explained:

⁷ According to Oxford Dictionary, an Imam is ‘the person who leads prayers in a mosque’.

I honestly felt like during the first weeks of classes every time I spoke people were surprised or if I made a joke people were surprised. I listen to a lot of music if I referenced to a song or movie they were like: ‘wow she listens to Music; she watches T.V.; oh my God’. As we grew up, because I was with the same people in lot of my classes, they get used to me and they know that I am just like everybody else. So it is not so bad but like I said the main challenge was letting people know like I have a brain and I talk a lot and I think they accepted that.

A number of the participants brought up the issue of arranged marriage in Muslim communities and identified the notion of “Muslim women as being forced to get married” as one of the most prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities. They talked about their experiences with their classmates or professors who questioned their right to choose their partners. These participants believed that such experiences reveal the prejudices of Canadians about the prevalence of arranged marriage amongst Muslim families and undermine Muslim women’s agency and power to have control over their love lives. Analyzing the data provided more insights to the fact that compared to the unveiled participants in the study, those who wore the veil reported more evidences of being the subjects of this particular stereotype as well. This means that the visibility that the hijab brings for the veiled participants makes them suitable targets for this stereotype. Amongst the three unveiled participants in the study, only one of them, Anisa, had been a target of these stereotypical behaviors. She recalled one of her professors who had presumed that her decision to get married was not her own. The professor had presumed that Anisa’s oppressive Muslim family had forced her to marry, and, according to Anisa, ‘there must have been someone else who had controlled her’.

Fatima, who wears the veil, talked about her experience with one of her professors who had questioned her choice for marriage in a destructive way. Fatima explained the situation:

We were all sitting and the professor was talking to some girls about their love lives and he was talking about their boyfriends and he comes to me and he is like ‘oh your parents probably have a long list of boys that you can meet and get married to’ and then I said ‘I can marry whoever I want’ and then he is like ‘oh really? Maybe I should take you to the synagogue with me and we can find you a nice Jewish boy’ and then I was really thrown

back by that. I am like ‘what do you like that is so out of nowhere’. Basically he was just picking on me because I was a visible Muslim, wearing the hijab.

Karima referred to her experiences with her classmates who had questioned her choice of marriage. According to her, even when she had wanted to emphasize the fact that she could choose her husband, one of her classmate had been very skeptical and asked her ‘you mean you really have a choice?’ and when Karima answered ‘yes, I have a choice. If I meet someone, then I can talk to my family and let them know. Even if I am introduced to someone, it would be my decision and his decision’, the classmate had just blown away like ‘oh, my God. Wow, you can actually choose’.

Jasmine also had a similar experience with one of her classmates who first had asked her if she had a boyfriend. When Jasmine explained to her that she did not have a boyfriend, but not because she was not allowed, but because she had not met anyone suitable yet, the woman continued like ‘oh, you do not have a boyfriend. So will you be forced to marry your cousin back home?’ Jasmine, who has an open-minded family, had not expected this. She said: ‘I was not expecting it but I was laughing at her innocence and lack of knowledge and exposure’.

There are studies that directly challenge the prevailing stereotypes in western societies about the prevalence of arranged marriage amongst Muslim families. For example, in a study by Tyrer and Ahmad (2006) the researchers concluded that the participants were aware of the empowering quality of university education in their lives and tried to use their university education as a tool to enhance their marital prospects and choices. According to Tyrer and Ahmad this finding clearly challenges the prevailing stereotype that arranged marriages are prevalent in Muslim families. Tyrer and Ahmad also have argued that this finding is consistent with the findings of the Equal Opportunities Commission’s (EOC) survey of 2006. According to the Equal Opportunities Commission’s survey, which was conducted among 1200 grade-11 students, about 90% of female students, mostly Muslim strongly believed that they had their parents’ support to continue with education and pursue careers. In addition, indicated that their parents did not expect them to marry or have children.

5.5 Muslim Identity- the Intersection of Gender, Race, Religion, and Ethnicity

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews is the challenges that the participants experienced in negotiating their multiple identities in Canadian universities. Several of the participants highlighted the impacts of the intersection of different axis of differentiation such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religion in their lives and identities, and discussed that their gendered, racial, ethnic, and religious identities made them feel marginalized within Canadian educational system. As Zine (2006a) argues 'in Canada and other western societies, the identities of Muslim girls converge on the matrix of race, ethnicity, and religious difference and create a nexus of interlocking oppressions that position them as subaltern subjects' (p. 246).

In addition, a number of the participants discussed the concept of cultural hybridity through a referral to their dual identities based on their ethnic origins and their nationalities. The concept of cultural hybridity is introduced by Bhabha (1994) and discussed by other scholars (for example, see Afshar et al., 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sirin et al., 2008; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Zine, 2001). According to Zine (2001), 'cultural hybridity refers to having dual identities based on ethnic origin or descent and one's national identity' (p. 420). Zine refers to cultural hybridity as an 'ontological reality' in our 'increasingly globalized, Diasporic world' (p. 420).

It should be noted that a number of the participants in my study did not show any signs of conflict, and were quite comfortable with their hyphenated identities. This is in line with the findings of several studies (for example, see Afshar et al., 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sirin et al., 2008). However, a few of the participants experienced some conflicts in asserting their hyphenated identities. This is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Sirin et al., (2008). This study indicated that while most young American Muslims were successful in experiencing 'their Muslim and American selves either as a coherent whole (integrated), or in separate domains of life (parallel)' (p. 274), only a small number of them experienced identity conflict. Afshar et al., (2009) have explained this notion:

Hybridity and hyphenated identities come more easily to women who through their lifecycle move along and between identities. They are not necessarily assimilated, but many shares the problems of women as a whole and have commonality of experience

with white, converted Muslim women who also cannot easily assimilate within their own society (p. 176).

The notion of cultural hybridity discussed above was brought up by Jasmine in my study. Jasmine was born to a Pakistani family and raised in Canada and identified herself as being both Canadian and Pakistani. Indeed, she manifested what Sirin and Fine (2008) called a ‘peaceful coexistence at the hyphen’ (p. 129) of Muslim Pakistani and Canadian identities. Jasmine believed that although she does not identify Pakistan as her home country, she does identify with the Pakistani culture. Although she was born in Canada, she speaks Urdu and Punjabi fluently; she wears traditional Pakistani clothes, and cooks and eats Pakistani food. Jasmine described her identity as working the hyphen and explained that she got this idea from an article about dual identities. Therefore she believed that she is both western and eastern.

In their book, “Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities Through Multiple Methods”, Sirin and Fine (2008) introduced the concept of ‘hyphenated selves’, which refers to young Muslim immigrants’ ‘many identities, including their standings as Muslims and Americans, that are at once joined and separated by history, politics, geography, biography, longings, and losses’ (p. 3). Thus, Sirin and Fine emphasized the fluid nature of this hyphenated identity ‘that is open to variation at the group (e.g., racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity) and the individual levels’ (p. 5). Consistent with Hall (1997), Sirin and Fine (2008) strongly believe in the fluid nature of cultural identities, which is more complex than being single, unitary, or fixed. Throughout their book, they carefully discussed how young first- and second-generation Muslims in the U.S. negotiate their Muslim and American identities, through ‘the psychological dynamics of working the hyphen’ (p. 6). Therefore, Sirin and Fine concluded that Muslim and American identities are not mutually exclusive as is proposed by Huntington (1993), who introduced the theory of ‘clash of civilization’ through which he labels ‘Muslim immigrants in the West the indigestible minority’ (p. 125).

Constructing and navigating ‘dual identities as Muslims and American college students’ (p. 452) is also highlighted by Stubbs and Sallee (2013), who demonstrated Muslim students’ ability to show integrated bicultural identities through preserving Islamic values and internalizing American society’s norms, simultaneously. Afshar et al., (2009) also discussed the notion of

hybridity through referring to many of the veiled Muslim women whom they interviewed, and asserted that many of them 'were comfortable with a multiplicity of identity, and defined themselves in terms of faith and nationality as British Muslims' (p. 175).

Consistent with the findings of the abovementioned studies, Jasmine featured an "integrated" dual cultural identity. Despite her success in learning to present an integrated dual cultural identity, she noted that, sometimes people find these two identities incompatible. In addition, sometimes people feel being under pressure to choose between their identities (see Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) discussed the multiple, and sometimes, conflicting identities and the fact that in some contexts, participants in their study had been asked to choose between their identities. By referring to the experiences of one of the African-American Muslim participants, Nasir and Al-Ami explained that some of the students had to 'privilege one aspect of their identities to the detriment of other equally important parts of themselves' (pp. 26-27). Nasir and Al-Amin also provided another example of one of the female African-American participants in the study, who wore the hijab and stated that 'a female student joked that before she began wearing the hijab, the Muslims on campus did not speak to her, but once she began covering, the African-American students stopped speaking to her' (p. 26).

Similarly, it was evident in Jasmin's interview that she had experienced some challenges over the construction of her multiple and fluid identities, especially around issues of ethnicity, nationality and her religion. As Zine (2001) has pointed out, many Muslim youth experience an ongoing challenge between 'three often conflicting cultural frameworks: the dominant culture, their ethnic culture, and Islam' (p. 404).

Although Jasmine was quite comfortable with her hyphenated identities and did not see any conflicts between her being both Pakistani and Canadian or, as she states, being both western and eastern, she was well aware of the colonizer perspective that views her as a member of "them" and not a member of "us". She has related the binary of "them" and "us" to her racial origin, highlighted the issue of racial difference and stated that 'everyone thinks when you are Canadian you are white, blonde hair, blue eyes. That is the colonizer perspective. And I always feel that in discussions generally it is us and them'.

The issue of racial origin and difference and its potential for racism, raised by Jasmine, is discussed by Brah (1996). It should be noted that according to Brah, although sometimes racial differences can be used to justify racism and oppression, the concept of difference is not necessarily always an indication of oppression; it can sometimes be an indication of a healthy diversity. Brah argued that:

Some constructions of difference such as racism posit fixed and immutable boundaries between groups signified as inherently different. Other constructions may present differences as rational, contingent, and variable. In other words, difference is not always a marker of hierarchy and oppression. Therefore, it is a contextually contingent question whether difference pans out as inequality, exploitation, and oppression or as egalitarianism, diversity, and democratic forms of political agency (pp. 125-126).

Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008) also highlighted the politics of difference and discussed the importance of acquiring ‘a knowledge about the politics of difference and identity that is informed by postcolonial, feminist, and queer analytic perspectives, which draws on a more nuanced understanding of the intersecting power relations involving issues of gender, ethnicity and sexuality’ (p. 418).

Similar to Jasmine, Anisa brought up the issue of race, and discussed that her racial differences and the way she looks could affect her sense of identity. Although she considered herself Canadian, she had come to the conclusion that whenever she is asked about her identity, she should introduce herself based on her racial and ethnic identity (as Pakistani) instead of her national identity (as Canadian). According to her, this way, she would be able to introduce herself to other people without making them confused. She stated:

It is funny I had this conversation with my parents that I am Canadian first and then Pakistani. My parents say you are Pakistani and you always will be because of the way that you look; that is a part of who you are. Sometimes I feel like suddenly put the Pakistani first when I am asked “where are you from?” When I was in Saudi Arabia working in my first job there was a man who looked at me and said where are you from? And I said I am from Canada because I am born and raised in Canada; I am Canadian; I have Canadian passport. Then he looked at me closely and said “really, where are you

from?” And he looked at my name tag and I said I am Pakistani my parents are from Pakistan.

To discuss the challenges associated with negotiating hybrid identities, Afshar et al., (2009) presented a similar example of ‘a high-flying, professional woman, daughter of a Sudanese mother and a British father’ (p. 177), who had asserted that ‘I can never say that I am British. When I do, people immediately ask, but where are you from originally?’ (p. 177).

By this statement, Anisa was actually referring to two notions, first, the fluid nature of her identity, and second, the visibility of her race and the fact that racial differences, manifested in her body, hinders her self-identification as a real Canadian. Anisa’s hesitance to identify herself as a real Canadian just because of her racial difference is attributed by Mahtani (2002) to the systematic racism and dominant definitions of the national narrative as white. Mahtani (2002) has argued that ‘some women of mixed race find it difficult to identify as Canadian despite their desire to do so because of systematic racism and dominant definitions of the national narrative as white’ (p. 86).

To answer the question ‘who is considered a real Canadian’ (p. 77) the women who participated in Mahtani’s study (2002) argued that ‘an authentic Canadian is of either British or French blood-those real Canadians who are part of a capital-C Canadian society’ (p. 77). Therefore, according to Mahtani, in order to be able to identify someone as a true and real Canadian she or he must be white.

As a Chinese woman raised and living in Canada, Yee (1993) highlights her challenges associated with a constant quest to find her true identity. She stated:

.....I discovered how horribly bound I had been in Canada- by racism, by displacement, by the painful search for identity as a Chinese woman in white dominated Canada, bound by not knowing, the depth and breadth of my loss (p. 9).

Her quest for identity, belonging, place, and voice is most evident in her self-exploratory and reflective essay when she has talked about herself as a Chinese woman living in Canada, who will never be Canadian. Yee (1993) explained her identity through referring to the Chinese term

of 'juk-sing' (p. 26). According to her, this term identifies 'Canadian-born Chinese as being bamboo, empty at both ends, meaning neither Chinese nor Western' (p. 26).

The fluid nature of identity highlighted by Anisa is discussed by several scholars (for example, see Hall, 1990, 1996a, 1996b; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). The ambivalence that Anisa felt about her racial/ethnic identity, manifested in her statement above, is similar to what many young African/American students feel and express about their racial/ethnic identity discussed by McCarthy and Crichlow (1993). McCarthy and Crichlow explained that 'the story of ethnic instability is no less true for more recent Asian, Latino, and Middle Eastern immigrants to the United States' (p. xiv). By highlighting the hybrid nature of racial identity, McCarthy and Crichlow mentioned that 'culture is a hybrid and for that matter racial identity is a hybrid too' (p. xv). In other words, by this statement, they emphasized the fact that racial identity is constructed within social interactions amongst different groups. Not intending to deny that there are 'certain stabilities associated with race', McCarthy and Crichlow believe that 'race is a social, historical, and variable category' (p. xv) and 'racial difference is the product of human interest, needs, desires, strategies, capacities, forms of organization, and forms of mobilization' (p. xv). However, they argue that the world is presently facing a period of 'a peculiar language of racial and ethnic certainly' and explained that 'the old Marxist and neo-Marxist orthodoxies of class and economic primacy in education debated are rapidly being replaced by the new pan/ethnic cultural orthodoxies of racial origins and racial identity' (p. xiv).

In addition, Anisa specifically addressed the issue of intersectionality and argued that compared to white men who are privileged because of their gender and race, as a minority woman, she has more challenges to overcome in Canadian society. Therefore, she believed that she has to work much harder than white men to attend the same level of achievement. This challenge is highlighted by Muhtaseb (2007) in an autobiographical study in which she reflected on her own experiences of teaching in an American university as a veiled Muslim faculty of color. She argued that compared to her 'white, especially male colleagues' (p. 32) she has to work much harder to reach the same level of achievement.

Mica also brought up the issue of intersectionality and the way it has affected her specific experiences in the Canadian society. She referred to her multiple identities as 'an African,

female, Muslim, and young student' and rightly highlighted different axis of differentiation in her identity (such as race, gender, religion, and age). She pointed out that:

Well... I always joke with my friend that I have... I have the worst set of cards in the sense that I am Muslim and there are a whole sets of stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslims, I am black, so I am from Sudan, I am female, what else... I am young, so there is the whole ageism kind of thing. Put together, obviously, I try my best to be a strong Muslim woman, be a strong African woman, represent who I am but at the same time I have to constantly make sure that I am within this society, within Canadian society so that is I am not "Othered".

By counting the different axis of differentiation (such as being Muslim, female, black, African, and young), which has made Mica vulnerable to being the "Other" in the Canadian society, she has indeed highlighted what we know as "intersectionality", which according to Hill-Collins (1990), 'refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example intersection of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation' (p. 18). In addition, Mica referred to the contradictions of her multiple, unstable and sometimes conflicting identities, while trying to address her coherent identity as 'a Muslim, African, female, young student'. She stated that her identity at the university is different from her identity at home or in the Mosque. She believed that her multiple identities make her amplify or de-amplify some of her traits in different settings. For example, in the Mosque, she focused on being the Muslim female that she is, learning about who she is, and interacting with other Muslim females. At home, she has to deal with her parents' own cultural expectations about what it means to be a good girl—to 'study and get married', and at the university she had to be a Canadian student.

Exhibiting parallel identities (Sirin et al., 2008), or living in parallel worlds, similar to what Mica does, is one of the important findings of Sirin and Fine's (2008) study. The study identified a small number of participants as comfortable commuters between 'two parallel, separate worlds' (p. 114) to invent 'new hybrid spaces' (p. 125).

In addition to the struggles that many of the participants experienced related to negotiating their multiple hyphenated identities discussed in this section, many of them, including those who were born and raised in Canada, demonstrated an intense struggle to belong. This is consistent with

the findings of a number of studies (for example, see Asmar et al., 2004; Mir, 2009a). One of the findings in Asmar's et al. study (2004) indicated a diminishing sense of belonging amongst Muslim students at both institutional and interpersonal levels. In my study, a number of participants felt they do not belong in Canada. A couple of them referred to connections to their countries of origin, and their strong desire to go back there someday. For example, Afifa believed that she will never be able to completely integrate into the Canadian society and will eventually return to her homeland, Pakistan. This is also in line with the findings of Mansouri and Kamp's (2007) study in which a number of Arab-Australian students participated. Although they had lived in Australia for a long time, these students did not view Australia as their true home. For a number of the participants of my study this quest to belong eventually led them to connect more deeply with their religion, Islam.

Mica, who has born in Libya and lived in both Libya and Sudan for a period of time before immigrating to Canada, talked about this experience as:

A huge struggle that I face is that sometimes I feel like I do not belong to this country... I was born in Libya, we visited Sudan very often when we were in Libya, so I am not a Libyan citizen, and I am Sudanese. But I have this dilemma where I feel like in this country, I do not belong, in Sudan I do not belong, and in Libya I am not even a citizen. I am expatriate's daughter so I do not belong, so this is why for me, my religion is my only thing I belong. It is just like living in the twilight zone. Yeah, because it is a basic human need to be... loved and to belong. So this is something I struggle with a lot.

As Mica pointed out, she did not feel a sense of belonging to any of the countries where she had lived so far, not even Canada, where she has lived the longest. According to Mica, the only thing to which she really belonged was her religion, Islam.

Similarly, Karima found a source of belonging through her religion and, therefore, felt more religious whenever she thought about her identity. She stated:

When I started thinking, 'what is my identity? Am I Canadian Muslim woman or Pakistani? What am I?' And I'd never been that cultural. I am starting to feel more religious.

The issues related to Diasporas of Islamic culture is discussed by Moghissi (2009), who believes that an inhospitable environment in a host society often leads to the formation of what she calls a “collective identity”, or “Diasporic consciousness and solidarity”. Therefore, according to Moghissi, ‘the racialization of Muslims and Muslim cultures creates, or at least accentuates, the need for community connections and support networks’ (p. xvii). Moghissi also discussed a ‘politicized Muslim identity’ which does not necessarily ‘represent an increased adherence to Islam as a religion but to Islam as an ideology of resistance and the only force that at present seems to effectively challenge global power structure and domination system’ (p. xvi). Moghissi indeed highlighted the need that many of participants in this research feel: the need to connect with MSAs (Muslim Students Associations) to affirm their Muslim Identities.

Since religion plays a salient role in the lives and identities of almost all of the participants in this study, many of them highlighted the supportive role that Muslim Students Associations (MSAs) play in constructing their religious identities as Muslims. Therefore, trying to overcome the struggle that several of the participants in this study experienced in negotiating their identities, they consciously or unconsciously connected to the Muslim Students Association of their respective universities. Through these connections, they were able to get the support they needed. In other words, the feeling of not belonging in Canada prompted these Muslim women to articulate their religious identities through their connections to MSAs. MSAs have helped many of these women experience belonging to a safe, welcoming place, and to affirm their Muslim identities.

Thus, “MSAs and their support” turned out to be an important subcategory for the theme identified, here, as “Muslim identity- the intersection of gender, race, religion, and ethnicity”. This is discussed in the following section.

5.5.1 MSAs and Their Support

For a number of the participants, MSAs and the sense of community and support that they provided for them were crucial in helping them maintain their Islamic identity. The supportive roles of MSAs have been highlighted in several studies (Mir, 2009b; Zine, 2000, 2001, 2008). Other studies (Sirin & Fine, 2008) have discussed the supporting role of peer groups for many Muslim students. For example, although Sirin and Fine (2008) do not specifically discuss MSAs,

they highlight the support of peer groups amongst Muslim students and argue that for many Muslim youth, 'peer support is not just about having others around but about having others around who understand their way of life' (p. 109).

According to Mir (2009b), 'MSAs represent, mobilize, educate, and connect Muslim students on campus and Muslim students often construct MSA spaces as the public official face of Islam' (p. 242). Zine (2000, 2001) classifies the Muslim Students Associations in high schools under the positive peer pressures and believes that MSAs have a positive impact on Muslim students by encouraging them to maintain their Muslim identities through exercising and maintaining of role performance as Muslim students. Zine (2001) also pointed to the negative peer pressure that can be exerted by both non-Muslim and Muslim students, who have chosen to assimilate and adopt the cultural norms of their mainstream societies.

Consistent with the literature discussed above, several participants in this study discussed the supportive role of MSAs in constructing their Muslim identities. It should be mentioned that through analyzing the data, what captured my attention was that wearing the hijab has had a meaningful impact on the participants' connections with the MSAs. Meaning that although all of the participants, including veiled and unveiled, acknowledged the supportive role of MSAs for Muslim students, none of the unveiled participants reported having relationship with MSAs. In addition, all of the participants emphasized the supportive role of MSAs in the specific context of wearing the hijab.

For example, Jasmine, who wears the hijab, believed that MSAs offer definite motivation and support to many Muslim women, especially in the context of wearing the hijab.

For Karima, who, similar to Jasmine, wears the hijab, the MSA has played a major role in supporting her faith and beliefs. She has pointed out that, prior to attending the university she was not strong enough to wear the hijab, whereas after starting her studies in the university, it became easier to do so, thanks to the support of the MSA. She stated:

I knew with a hijab I wouldn't be able to handle the pressure. I was not strong enough. It comes down to that. There were other girls in my high school that started wearing the hijab and I have great respect for them. One of my friends just said yesterday she got

apple cores thrown at her in high school. She went to the same school. I was not strong enough then and when I came to the university I knew that I had the support of MSA to wear that.

Kausar also emphasized MSA's role in supporting her to wear the hijab. She talked about the sense of community that MSAs have created for Muslim students, and pointed out that connection to the MSA made her believe that she is not alone in her beliefs, and that she can enjoy the support of other Muslims in time of need. She explained:

We are a part of this community and within a community that respects us, that loves us, honors us, so even if there are people who have stereotypes we know for a fact that our Muslim brothers, the ones who are obviously a part of our community, are there for us. So that is always like a really good thing to have and know because it is really hard when you feel you are alone in your beliefs like wearing the veil and you think I am constantly scared that I am going to be attacked or constantly scared that someone is going to say something to me or try to hurt me in some way.

Mica mentioned both positive and negative peer pressures although not in the context of MSAs. She referred to her friendship with other Muslim students and the fact that, with their supports and respect, it has been easier for her to overcome different pressures in the university environment. She specifically talked about the pressure for partying, which typically involves drinking, and explained:

Internally, I am a Muslim; there are certain beliefs that I have. For example, I do not drink alcohol. Partying, because it involves alcohol, I do not do it. So early on, there would be that pressure to go to a party or to be in an environment that is surrounded by alcohol, I feel I was constantly in this environment of pressure, but because of friends who have a good sense of respect, I was able to avoid alcohol and go away from partying situations.

As it is evident from the participants' statements mentioned above, MSAs have had significant impact in supporting Muslim students to negotiate their religious identities in Canadian universities. As Zine (2008) argues 'MSAs structure Muslim students' resistance around

religious identification as a site for social and political action and educational critique' (p. 10). She emphasizes the impacts of MSAs in establishing a form of 'formalized resistance' (p. 10) for high-school Muslim students and states that MSAs provides Muslim students with essential power to negotiate their religious identities in Canadian public schools settings.

5.6 Challenging the Stereotypes

Data analysis provided further insights and indicated that the participants in this study are not passive recipients of the reductive stereotypes about Muslim women, which prevail in the Canadian educational system. On the contrary, it showed that they all are active agents who actively and consciously challenge the stereotypes in constructive ways. In other words, rather than taking in all the negativities conveyed by the stereotypes and losing their self-confidence, the participants have decided to be active and get engaged in constructive ways of resistance. These women's positive responses to a negative situation have helped them to turn a destructive circumstance to an instructive one. They all felt that as informed, educated, and active agents in society, who were well aware of the politics behind the construction of the category Muslim women that construct and perpetuate a negative image of Islam and especially Muslim women (for example, see Bilge, 2010; Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Falah, 2005; Horwedel, 2006; Khiabany & Williamson, 2008; sensoy & Marshal, 2010; Watt, 2011a, 2011b; Zine, 2002) they were more responsible to resist and break down the stereotypes.

This is consistent with the findings of several studies in the field, which have demonstrated Muslim students' desire to be good representatives of their religion and culture, and educate other people about Islamic beliefs (for example, see Horwedel, 2006; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Several of the participants in Nasir and Al-Amin's study (2006) actively challenged the prevailing stereotypes about Muslims. These participants decided to inform non-Muslims about Islam and Islamic beliefs and practices through their daily interactions with them. However, according to Nasir and Al-Amin, by getting involved in this role, these participants 'took on the burden of representing all Muslims' (p. 25).

Challenging the stereotypes through educating non-Muslims about Islam is also discussed in other studies. For example, Horwedel (2006) argues that since the perceptions of Americans about Islam and Muslims grow increasingly negative, many Muslim students and faculty

members in American universities are pushed to educate non-Muslims about Islam and Islamic beliefs. She asserts that while some Muslims get overwhelmed and tired with this burden 'others embrace the opportunity to increase awareness and understanding' (p. 14). Further, Horwedel discusses American media and the role it plays in portraying a quite distorted picture of Islam and Muslims, and to perpetuate misconceptions about them. Horwedel also argues that Muslim students are quite aware about the politics behind this process.

In line with the findings of the studies mentioned here, several of this study's participants chose to create and reify live examples of Muslim women's identities through their own behaviors. Through that, they resisted and challenged non-Muslim peoples' stereotypes about Muslim women and their identities. Therefore, for a number of participants the responsibility was formed around the belief that they should represent Muslim women properly through their own behavior. These women tried to be the best representatives for other Muslim women in the society whose identities are narrowly constructed through negative reductive stereotypes.

However, several participants played a more active role and felt responsible for educating other non-Muslims in their daily interactions with them. These women tried to become more educated and informed about Islam and Islamic beliefs, and believed that by becoming well-educated about Islam, they would be able to present the best answers to questions about their faith by non-Muslims. Therefore, although each of the participants in this study had responded in different unique ways to the existing stereotypes, the core of all of their actions was identical, namely; resistance.

For example, Fatima decided to be really active, and, as she has explained, 'to give back, and to make the community better'. Indeed, she decided to portray the best image of a Muslim woman through her humanitarian activities, for example by starting an organization that teaches self-defense and martial arts to abused women and children, and helping them to boost their mental health and well-being. Fatima's positive attitude towards social changes and her passion for humanitarian activities is evident in her statement:

You have got to fight back. Otherwise they will label you how they want to label you and it is so easy to just follow the label. I can just sit at home, that is the easy thing to do but you know none of the great Muslims did that, they all went out. Whatever they did, if

your gift is you know, speaking ability or your writing ability then that's what you should do. For me it is like working with people, spreading the martial arts or whatever I do is what my thing is, that is why you have got to take what you have and just go for it.

Somewhere else she pointed out:

We really need to get out there and instead of just preaching like people think when you are trying to spread Islam that you need to preach it right, just talk, talk, talk. But sometimes you just need to shut up and just do, right? So we do. I am like there are so many things you can do, just find your niche of what you like to do and just go for it.

Kausar mentioned that Muslim women resist the stereotypes by being active agents in their societies. She stated:

Yeah it is a resistance in itself to be active. It is just say no, like 'I know your stereotype but I do not follow it; that is not me, that is not who I am'. We do it because we want to be a part of our communities and that is just something that is always been a part of who we are. We have always been active, there has always been Muslims in this city doing so many things and it is always women. It is always women who are running these things and putting these things together and they want to change.

The participants' challenges against the existing reductive stereotypes about them are evident in their behaviors and attitudes discussed in this section. It should be mentioned that although articulated in different ways in the interviews, these aforementioned active spirits were common to all of transcriptions. The women felt the need and responsibility to get involved in constructive behaviors, first to represent Muslim women properly and second to educate other people and assist them in fixing their stereotypical perceptions and prejudices about Islam, and especially Muslim women. Therefore, two subcategories can be identified under the theme "challenging the stereotypes": (1) challenging the stereotypes through presenting a sound representation of Muslim women, and (2) challenging the stereotypes through educating other people. These subcategories are discussed with more details in the next two sections.

5.6.1 Challenging the Stereotypes through Presenting a Sound Representation of Muslim Women

The desire to be a good representative of Muslim women was mentioned by several participants in this study. These participants believed that they have the responsibility to challenge the stereotypes by being good representatives of Muslim women. This finding is consistent with one of the findings in Seggie and Sanford's study (2010). This study discussed Muslim female university students' attempts to be good representatives of other Muslims while highlighting the fact that this could put extra pressure on Muslim students. Seggie and Sanford argued that:

Muslim undergraduate female students feel they are representative of the Muslim world in almost all aspects of campus life, which seems to be a post-9/11 phenomenon. They see part of their role, as Muslim women, as needing to eradicate the negative post 9/11 image of Islam created in the media and among non-Muslim communities. This might put extra pressure on these students creating a sense that they are constantly under scrutiny in terms of what they say or how they behave (p. 77).

It should be mentioned that almost all of the participants were fully aware of the politics of knowledge production about Muslim women that construct and perpetuate a negative and reductive image of Islam, in general, and Muslim women, in particular (for example, see Bilge, 2010; Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Falah, 2005; Jafri, 1998; Horwedel, 2006; Khiabany & Williamson, 2008; Sensoy & Marshal, 2010; Neider, 2009; Watt, 2011a, 2011b; Zine, 2002). This finding was expected, in view of the fact that this study is consisted of university students who are educated enough to understand the politics behind the construction of the category Muslim women as the "Other". The participants' justifications of the responsibility they felt were based on their beliefs that since they have more knowledge compared to non-educated Muslim women, they have more responsibility. For example, Fausia stated:

Because I think I am very politically minded I understand the symbolism of my hijab and feel the responsibility of it. For example, I do not like the Jay walk; I do not like to cross the street because I did that once and someone yelled at me from the window and said 'go home you Arab' or something like that. But it was in high school once I moved here like 6 years ago and ever since then I was like 'oh if I Jay walk it makes all the Arabs all the

Muslims look bad' and I just felt like I do have the responsibility to represent myself and other Muslim women well; so I try really hard to do that.

She also added:

I do feel like a part of me feels responsibility to get involved to break the stereotypes. For example, if Palestine and Israel come up in classes I feel I have the responsibility to defend the Palestinians' point of views. Because that does not always happen or in my international relations class we talk about terrorism. I feel the need to be an educated and informed participant in the class so that they know here is a Muslim woman and she has an intelligent say on the subject. So I do feel that I have some responsibility but I enjoy it. I like stepping up to the challenges.

Fatima talked about her experiences with her classmates, who typically hold the belief that all Muslim women are oppressed. Further, she highlighted the way her classmates' stereotypical beliefs were challenged when they knew Fatima and learnt about her active personality. She stated:

They think Muslim women only stay at home, they think that Muslim women only think a certain way and that Muslim women are oppressed by their men and like I am breaking all of those thoughts in their minds because I defy everything they're saying Muslim women are.

In addition, Fatima stated that many Canadians believe Muslim women cannot be athletic or get engaged in different sports; they think that 'Muslim women just sit down and do not do anything', and the fact that Fatima is athletic, engaged in sports, and does martial arts is surprising to them.

Kausar mentioned the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women as 'to be a certain way', 'not educated', 'quiet, do not talk, and usually men tell them what to do'; she also referred to the fact that many white people think that 'Muslim women are not active in their communities'. As just discussed in the case of Fatima, the fact that Kausar 'is very active in the community, very educated, and very loud' surprised these people. Kausar explained:

When people see me for the first time and when I speak and I am very, very loud they are just like ‘wow, where did that voice come from’. Usually, I’m supposed to be like all timid or whatever; it is what people want to believe what Muslim women are supposed to be. But, no I speak loudly, I speak clearly and I guess that maybe some people just right off the bat they are just like ‘oh my gosh, I did not expect that from her’ and then they just get surprised more and more as they get to know me like ‘I did not know that she does those things and I did not know Muslim women were even allowed to do those things’, you know, to be in governance and be responsible and manage things and stuff like that.

Kausar challenged the stereotype that Muslim women are passive objects in society. She argued that almost every Muslim woman that she knows is ‘an active part of the community both in the Muslim and non-Muslim’ and pointed to ‘many Muslim sisters who are a part of the newsletter, the university student council, and other similar social activities’. She added:

There are always more sisters in governance than brothers; they are very active and play a huge role in the Muslim community at universities and the non-Muslim community; they want to get their voices out there.

Anisa felt responsible to represent Muslim women through her behavior and ‘by the ways she treats others or live her life’. She believed that she had to try ‘being the best representative possible especially at a time when there are so many negativities and negative perceptions about Muslim women, and how they are floating around’. She stated:

I might not voice my concerns maybe so publically. But I feel like I am a good person a good member of the community and then if people find out that I am Muslim and I am Pakistani maybe I might be able to change their perceptions or ideas.

In addition, Anisa talked about the way events like 9/11 have affected Muslim people, and about the responsibility of Muslims to be more active in challenging the stereotypes. She pointed out:

I think before 9/11 things were in the background but now they are in the foreground. Before 9/11 I was trying to be a good representative of Muslim women. Now, after 9/11 I have to work doubly hard to break down those ideas and stereotypes.

It should be mentioned that although all of the participants demonstrated their active resistance through either representing other Muslim women or educating non-Muslims about Islam, none of them complained about the burden. On the contrary, they were all thrilled to have the opportunity to show their resistance towards all the negativities conveyed by the stereotypes and prejudices about Muslim women. This finding is in contrast with the findings of other studies (for example, see Seggie & Sanford, 2010; Horwedel, 2006; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006) that highlighted the extra pressure on Muslim women's shoulder to represent all Muslim women or educate non-Muslims about Islamic beliefs.

5.6.2 Challenging the Stereotypes through Educating Other People

Consistent with the findings of a number of studies (for example, see Khan, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008) a number of the participants in this study also felt responsible for educating other people to help them fix their impaired perceptions of Islam and especially Muslim women. For example, findings from Sirin and Fine's study (2008) indicated that many young Muslim girls who participated in their study felt responsible for educating other people to change their minds. Sirin and Fine (2008) highlighted this form of resistance amongst the participants of their study and pointed to their strong spirit. They stated: 'to challenge the assumption of 'oppressed woman', these young women exhibit strength, authority, and confidence' (pp. 116-117). Khan (2009) also highlighted the responsibility that many young Muslim Americans in her study felt to correct the prevailing negative stereotypes about Muslims and to 're-present their religion in a positive light' (p. vi). Khan argued that the participants 'felt obligated to act as ambassadors of Islam, even though they recognized the difficulties involved in this responsibility' (p. vi).

The role that education can play in assisting people to correct their stereotypical attitudes towards people with different racial profiles are discussed in several studies (Sleeter, 2005; Cohen & Peery, 2006). For example, Cohen and Peery (2006) highlighted their teaching experience in which they provided non-Muslim students with information about Muslim women and their lives by using different genres, such as short stories, essays, graphic novels, and films. They discussed how in this way they helped most students correct their misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslim women. They concluded that after studying various texts about Muslim women, 'most students' perceptions became more fair and realistic' (p. 20).

In the psychological views about racism discussed by Sleeter (2005) and mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is argued that education can help people fix their biased behaviors and misconceptions about people from different races. Consistent with this view about racism, participants in this study also believed that people are quite capable of revisiting their stereotypes about other people if they are be presented with actual facts and information about those people and their lives. Therefore, these women took their responsibilities seriously and got engaged in educating other people about Islam, especially Muslim women, and their identities.

For example, when Jasmine decided to wear the hijab, many of her friends asked her different questions about the hijab. However, according to Jasmine, she always welcomes white students' curiosity and, as she pointed out, it has never bothered her. For Jasmine 'it was just a chance to educate them'.

Jasmine believed that 'knowledge is power'. She admitted that she may not have a great deal of knowledge to always have the right answers. However, she has constantly tried to improve her approach, so that, as she has stated, people with questions could arrive to a meaningful answer as opposed to another stereotype. Jasmine believed that it is not necessarily only the media that creates and perpetuates certain negative perceptions about Islam or Muslim women. Rather, sometimes it is the Muslims themselves who do not know how to educate non-Muslim people about Islam, and contribute to the creation of new stereotypes or perpetuation of the old ones. Jasmine pointed to the fact that Muslims span over a spectrum, and conservative orthodox Muslims, who do not properly respond to people, can contribute to the creation of the negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslim women. She stated that 'even if people hear twenty of the same ignorant approaches from Muslim people, maybe my one attempt at rationalizing like the role of a woman in Islam would maybe open their eyes and ears to different perspective'.

For Afifa the scenario was exactly the same. She felt that, due to what is happening in the media and the propaganda against Islam and Muslims, she needed to first educate herself and then others. However, for Afifa, who looks only for first-hand knowledge about Islam, the only reliable source of knowledge was the Quran. Therefore, she did not listen to any of the scholars, but, rather, wanted to understand the Quran by herself. As she pointed out, after coming to

Canada, she started to read the Quran with translation, to be able to understand its true meaning and to educate other people.

Kausar elaborated on her reactions when she comes across ignorant people. She felt that she had to educate them. It is important for her to express herself so openly that people understand her. She stated:

Most of the time when I do experience somebody who I know is just being stereotypical, have prejudices or being racist towards me then I definitely do put myself out there more than I should or more than I usually do just to resist their stereotypes and level the playing field and teaching them that it is not true by saying like you have these stereotypes about me but it is not true.

Fausia mentioned that she has continuously tried to defy the stereotypes, but she believed that ‘it is going to be an ongoing battle’. She explained that when she was 12 or 13 years old, people often approached and asked her ‘why do you fast during Ramadan’? Or people asked her such questions about arranged marriage such as ‘your parents are going to set you up’? At the time, Fausia did not know how to answer. However, after a while, she realized that ‘it is very important to be educated on what you are standing for it’. Thus, from then on, she has made it one of her goals to always be on top of what is happening around her.

The statements of the participants in this study discussed in the sections of “challenging the stereotypes” and its two subcategories, clearly indicated Muslim women’s active spirit and strong personalities in combating negative stereotypes prevailing in Canadian higher educational system. All of the participants felt responsible for challenging the stereotypes. For some, this responsibility was formed around the issue of representation; pushing them to be the best representatives of Muslim women by the way they had lived their lives. Other participants felt a need to educate and inform non-Muslims about Islam and Muslim women. Despite the fact that this challenge demands considerable amount of energy and time, none of the participants complained about the burden.

5.7 Summary

Chapter 5 specifically dealt with the different themes that emerged from the interviews. The themes were analyzed through literature and theories of third-wave feminism, anti-racist feminism, and post-colonial feminism. Not intending to generalize the findings, the themes indicated some commonalities in the participants' perspectives, and their shared experiences of higher education in Canada. The themes include (1) the hijab and its significance; (2) multiple meanings of the hijab; (3) race, racism, and Othering; (4) Muslim women's oppression; (5) Muslim identity- the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion; and (6) challenging the stereotypes. Each of the themes identified in this chapter also consisted of a few subcategories. The aforementioned six themes and their subcategories were discussed in light of the existing literature in the area and the theories applied for this research.

Chapter 6

6. Conclusion

Drawing on the theories of Third-wave feminism, post-colonial feminism, and anti-racist feminism, this investigation was an attempt to give voice to Muslim female students to interrogate the power dynamics at play from within the core of higher educational institutions in Canada, and allow ‘the colonized to be the subject of legitimate knowledge’ (Seggie & Mabokela, 2009, p. 13). Theories of Third-wave feminism, post-colonial feminism, and anti-racist feminism were chosen to inform this study for their considerable potentials to deal with the complex intersectionalities of Muslim women’s experiences. According to Weiler (1993),

It is the potential of educational institutions to be sites for critique and open and heated discussion that makes them dangerous and feared by those who want acquiescence and ignorance about the realities of power and privilege. Repeatedly (and certainly in the present political climate) elites have attempted to narrow democracy to a limited sphere of individual interests, while leaving political discussion and power to the few (p. 223).

Therefore, concerning social issues such as inequality, oppression, and domination faced and experienced by many Muslim female university students, this research sought to provide further insights into the experiences of a group of Muslim female university students in Canada.

I believe Muslim female students deserve special attention because this group experiences a great deal of marginalization in the aftermath of September 11th, marked by a sharp increase in anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia in western societies. By providing insights into the experiences of Muslim female university students in Canada, this research also intended to bridge the gap in the literature. Existing literature in this field revealed that although, in recent years, considerable attention has been directed to studying the educational experiences of minority female students in different parts of the world, studies on Muslim female university

students in Canada, are limited. Most of the studies on Muslim female students are concentrated on Muslim school girls, and conducted in the U.K., U.S., and not in Canada.

My research was particularly concerned with the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion and its impact on the process of identity construction of Muslim female students and their overall experiences of higher education in Canada. It provided nuanced analysis of the ways Muslim female university students respond to the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities; these reductive stereotypes homogenize Muslim women as oppressed by Islamic patriarchy. My research highlighted the problems associated with the prevailing tendency in western societies to erase the cultural and historical specificity of Muslim women's lives in the Third World, particularly in the context of wearing the hijab. My research contributed to expanding the knowledge about Diasporic Muslim women's experiences and furthered insight into the practice of veiling, its meanings, and its impact on the lives of Diasporic Muslim women.

In this chapter, I will first re-state research questions and briefly explain the process of data gathering. Then, I will summarize research findings and discuss their significance and implications for educating Muslim university students. Finally, I will address research limitations and provide suggestions for future research in this field.

6.1 Research Questions

To fulfill the objectives of the study and to answer the overall question: “what are the experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities?” case study qualitative research method, was utilized as a suitable method for this research. Therefore, ten Muslim female students were interviewed by using semi-structured interview protocol. In addition to the question identified above, participants were also asked to provide answers to the three sub-questions of the research, including:

- 1- How does the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion impact Muslim female students' identity construction and their overall experiences of higher education in Canada?

- 2- What are Muslim female students' perceptions of, and reactions towards the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities?
- 3- What does the veil and wearing the veil within the university mean to Muslim female students? How do they perceive the hijab?

The initial stage of sampling started with an advertisement in four different Canadian universities. Through this method, however, I managed to find only a few participants. Therefore, due to difficulties in reaching volunteers for this research, I resorted to the snowball sampling strategy (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Thus, I asked the existing participants to inform other Muslim female university students whom they knew, to provide them with my contact information. Eventually, I recruited the rest of the participants through the snowball sampling strategy and with the help of two key informants.

6.2 Research Findings

One of the most significant findings of this study was the crucial role that the hijab plays in constructing Muslim female students' experiences of higher education in Canada. Data analysis revealed that the issue of the hijab was heavily weighted in every interview. Almost all of the participants were preoccupied with the issue of the hijab and almost in all of the interviews the participants voluntarily talked extensively about the challenges associated with wearing the hijab within Canadian universities. In addition, although both veiled and unveiled participants had similar experiences of higher education in Canada, those who wore the hijab reported more overt incidences of discriminatory behaviors from their professors and peers in their respective universities. These participants highlighted the marginalization that they felt within Canadian higher education institutions. These findings clearly revealed the significance of the hijab in the lives and educational experiences of Diasporic Muslim women. In addition, all of the participants believed that many white non-Muslim Canadians regard the hijab as the most important symbol of Muslim women's oppression in western societies. The veiled participants discussed the extra pressure that they felt as a result of wearing the hijab in Canadian universities. They also identified several negative stereotypes about veiled Muslim women in Canadian universities.

The study highlighted the heterogeneity of Muslim women's identities and its impact on their perceptions of the hijab. It emphasized the need for a nuanced analysis of the cultural, political, historical, and geographical contexts in which the practice of veiling is exercised. Despite the stereotypes that homogenize Muslim women on the basis of their religion and faith and portray a distorted monolithic and universalized image of veiled Muslim women as being forced to wear the hijab and oppressed by Islamic patriarchy, the women whom I interviewed highlighted their agencies to choose the way they dressed. The study demonstrated the specificities of the participants' lives in different socio-cultural contexts and its impact on their perceptions of the hijab. The participants showed strong objections about their voices being erased from the dominant discourses about the meaning of the hijab, and emphasized that western societies must include Muslim women's voices and opinions in mainstream discourses about the hijab. The participants discussed their specific viewpoints about the veil, and identified four different meanings of the hijab including the hijab as a message, the hijab as a feminist strategy, the hijab as a religious requirement, and the hijab as a non-essential component of Muslim women's identity.

In addition, the study discussed race, racism, and Othering as prominent factors in Canadian universities. It should be mentioned that none of the participants believed that they had directly experienced racism in their respective universities. However, a number of them pointed to the feeling of being Othered in their interactions with the majority white non-Muslim students. They also highlighted accent discrimination and racial prejudices of some professors and non-Muslim peers. In addition, all of the participants acknowledged that racism exists in the Canadian educational system and in the Canadian society in general. Here again the hijab had a significant role in constructing women's experiences. Thus, compared to the unveiled participants, those who had chosen to wear the veil reported more overt incidences of discriminatory behaviors from their professors and peers in their respective universities. Although all of the participants chose not to use the word "racism" to explain their experiences, the sense of Othering, accent discrimination, and/or racial prejudices that they had felt clearly indicated the existence of racism within higher educational institutions in Canada.

Another important finding of the study related to the feelings of exclusion and invisibility, felt mostly by the veiled participants in their interactions with the majority white non-Muslim

students and faculties. Most of the participants who wore the hijab stated that it was difficult for them to befriend, or to continue friendship, with the majority white non-Muslim students, whereas immigrant or international students who were more approachable and easier to get along and befriend.

The participants reported being treated and perceived differently by the majority white non-Muslim students and faculty based on the negative reductive stereotypes about Muslim women. Amongst different stereotypes identified and discussed by the participants, two were highlighted and emphasized the most. These were “Muslim women as oppressed” and “Muslim women as forced to be veiled”. According to the participants, these stereotypes erase the differences amongst Muslim women and portray a homogenized picture of all Muslim women as being oppressed by Islamic patriarchy. The participants discussed their differences and highlighted the heterogeneity of their lives and identities in different cultural, historical, political, and geographical contexts. The participants challenged the notion of Muslim women as those in need of being rescued. They strongly echoed their voices indicating that they do not need to be saved. The participants also challenged the popularity of arranged marriage amongst Muslim families, and highlighted the fact that Muslim families honor and respect their daughters’ opinions about their life partners.

The findings also highlighted the challenges of negotiating multiple identities amongst Muslim women in Canadian universities. They clearly showed the impacts of the intersection of different axis of differentiation, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religion in Muslim women’s lives and identities. Muslim women who participated in this research experienced marginalization within Canadian higher educational system based on their gender, racial, ethnic, and religious identities. In addition, the findings highlighted the existence of dual identities amongst Muslim women based on their ethnic origin and their nationality (see Afshar et al., 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Sirin et al., 2008; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013) and indicated that while a number of the participants did not show any signs of conflict and were quite comfortable with their hyphenated identities, a few of them experienced some conflicts in asserting their hyphenated identities.

This study’s findings emphasized that Muslim Students Associations (MSAs) could help Muslim female students maintain their Islamic identities. Here, again, the impact of wearing the hijab

was significant and meaningful in this regard. In other words, while none of the unveiled participants reported having relationship with Muslim Students Association in their respective universities, the participants who wore the hijab had stronger connections with MSA. In addition, all of the participants who wore the hijab emphasized the supportive role of Muslim Students Associations in the specific context of wearing the hijab.

Finally, the findings indicated that Muslim women were not passive recipients of the reductive stereotypes about their lives and identities prevalent in Canadian educational system. On the contrary, they were all active agents, who actively and consciously challenged the stereotypes in constructive ways. Not only did they not internalize those negative stereotypes but also warned others about the dangers of unconsciously falling into this pitfall. In addition, they did not lose their self-confidence and became more determined to get engaged in constructive ways of resistance. In other words, through exercising their resistance, these women used this negative situation as a means to empowerment. For a number of them, the responsibility was formed around the belief that they should be the best representatives for other Muslim women in society whose identities are narrowly constructed through the negative reductive stereotypes.

Others decided to exercise a more active role and resisted through actively educating other non-Muslims about Islam and Islamic beliefs in their daily interactions with them. To this end, these women tried to become more informed and educated about their Islamic beliefs and believed that by becoming well-educated about their faith, they were able to present the best answers to questions by non-Muslims. Therefore, although all the participants in this study were engaged in different unique ways in responding to the existing stereotypes, the core of all of their actions was identical, that is, resistance.

This resistance clearly indicated Muslim women's social awareness and their active role in society. As this study has clearly showed, none of the Muslim women in the study were passive recipients of social injustice. On the contrary, all of them proved to be active agents with strong determination to bring about changes in their lives, and to combat inequalities in their universities. Although all of these women devoted considerable amounts of their time and energy to this challenge, none of them complained about the responsibility.

6.3 Significance and Implications of the Study

In recent years, an overwhelmingly large number of minority women have accessed to higher education in North America, and utilize that as a means to gain empowerment. Despite women's access to higher education, there are still a large number of minority female students who experience feelings of marginalization within Canadian higher educational institutions. Obviously, the time and energy that these students use, on a daily basis, to deal with the negative consequences of the perceived racism and prevailing stereotypes within higher educational institutions could more effectively be devoted to their studies and the enhancement of their future careers. By focusing on Muslim female university students as active members of a significant visible minority group in Canada, this research aimed at demystifying, albeit partially, the complex experiences of this marginalized group in Canada, and to raise awareness about their challenges within Canadian higher educational institutions.

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy makers at the higher education level in Canada. By informing university authorities and policy makers about the challenges that this significant minority group faces in Canadian universities, there is potential for positive changes to take place in future.

6.4 Limitation of the Study and Future Research

As I discussed earlier in Chapter 3, similar to any other research project, my research also faced with some limitations. These limitations are mostly due to the snowball sampling strategy and its limitations used in this research. One of the limitations of this technique is that it can produce a sample population that is not the best representative of the whole population.

Using “maximum variation strategy” (Patton, 2002) or “maximum sampling strategy” (Creswell, 2008), my intention was to choose a sample of Muslim female university students who would be diverse in terms of their fields and levels of studies (i.e., to include both graduate and undergraduate levels), marital status, age, ethnicity, language, culture, being secular or traditional, and levels of devotion to Islam judged by external criteria such as wearing the hijab. However, after I was unsuccessful in finding all the cases necessary for my research, and due to time constraints, I had to resort to the snowball sampling strategy. Consequently, most of the participants in this study were found through this technique.

I am well aware that although using this strategy facilitated reaching and selecting information-rich cases, it entailed some limitations of the study as it made me choose a sample that might not have been as diverse as was initially planned. Therefore, a larger number of the participants eventually turned out to be religiously oriented Muslim students with a strong sense of Muslim identity. Self-identification as Muslims and being religiously oriented means practicing the faith in some levels. In addition, many religious Muslim women consider wearing the veil as a crucial component in practicing Islam. Therefore, most of the participants in this study turned out to be veiled and practicing Muslim women (7 veiled students compared to 3 unveiled students). I am also well aware that if I could include more non-religious and non-practicing Muslim women into the study, my sample would have been richer in terms of the diversity of Muslim women's experiences and perspectives. Despite this limitation, analysis of the data revealed significant differences amongst the participants. The findings further highlighted the need to consider Muslim women's heterogeneities and to avoid homogenizing them based on their religion and faith.

Another limitation of this study is that in case study qualitative research, one cannot generalize the findings from a single case to other similar cases (Merriam, 1988). The lack of generalizability in case study qualitative research is regarded by some scholars as a limitation of this method. Although my intention was not to generalize across the population of Muslim women, the lack of generalizability in my research still can be regarded as a limitation.

Therefore, the findings of this study drawn from in-depth interviews with 10 Muslim female university students cannot be generalized to other Muslim female university students in Canada. They can only provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences of these 10 Muslim female university students.

To obtain more insights into the experiences of Muslim female university students in Canada, and to demystify different aspects of the challenges that this marginalized group faces in Canadian universities, future research should consider choosing a larger and more diverse group of participants. In addition, the overwhelmingly heavy weight on the hijab in this study suggests that there is a need for more research on the issue of the hijab in Canadian universities. Therefore, future research should focus more broadly on the hijab in Canadian universities,

exploring different aspects of the hijab, especially from Muslim women's perspectives. As discussed earlier, my research provided further insight into the saliency of the hijab, its significance, and its crucial role in constructing the experiences of Muslim female university students in Canadian universities. The findings of my research expanded and furthered to the existing literature in the area. However, future research with broader focus on the hijab would potentially provide more insights into the experiences of those Muslim female students who choose to practice veiling as a way of life, and into the challenges that they face in Canadian universities.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

- 1- What is your experience as a Muslim female student studying in a Canadian university?
- 2- How do you think your gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and/or a combination of them impact your experiences as a Muslim woman studying in a Canadian university?
- 3- What challenges do you encounter as a Muslim woman studying in a Canadian university?
- 4- How do you think about the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian university? Do you challenge or accept them?
- 5- What does it mean to you being veiled within university? How do you perceive the hijab?
- 6- To what extent do you believe that being veiled in the university is a signifier of Muslim women's oppression?



*Muslim Female Students and Their
Experiences of Higher Education in Canada*

Introduction

My name is Farzaneh Khosrojerdi and I am a Ph.D candidate at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am currently conducting research into the Experiences of Muslim female students in Canadian universities and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to explore Muslim female students' experiences of higher education in Canada. I am interested to learn about Muslim female students' perceptions of and reactions to the prevailing stereotypes about Muslim women in Canadian universities. In this research, I will examine Muslim female students' opinions about wearing the veil in Canadian universities and about the veil as a signifier of Muslim women's oppression in the Canadian higher educational system. I intend to give voice to Muslim female students through hearing their perceptions of the hijab.

If you agree to participate

If you agree to participate in this study you will be involved in one informal interview with the researcher in an agreed upon location at your convenience. In this conversation you will be asked to answer some questions about your experiences as a Muslim female student in one Canadian university. Every interview will be audio- recorded, transcribed into written format, and takes about one hour.

Confidentiality

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. I will honour your privacy by protecting anonymity and giving you a pseudonym. The data collected will be destroyed upon the completion of the study.

Risks & Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic status.

Questions

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University at **[phone number]** or **[email address]**. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Farzaneh Khosrojerdi at **[phone number]** or **[email address]**. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti at **[phone number]** or **[email address]**.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada

Farzaneh Khosrojerdi, Western University

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: Farzaneh Khosrojerdi

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:

Appendix 4: Advertisement

Advertisement

My name is Farzaneh Khosrojerdi. I am a Ph.D. candidate at Western University. I am currently in the initial stage of conducting a research for my Ph. D. Dissertation. This is to invite you to participate in this research entitled “*Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada*”. I am looking for 10 Muslim female, who are currently studying in a Canadian university.

The aim of the study is to explore Muslim female students’ experiences of higher education in Canada. I intend to give voice to Muslim female students through listening to their perceptions of the hijab. The participants in the study will be involved in an interview with the researcher, in an agreed upon location at their convenience. In this conversation the participants will be asked to answer some questions about their experiences and challenges in their universities. Every Interview will take about one hour.

If you are interested in participating in this research or if you have any question regarding the research, please contact me by email [email address] or by phone [phone number]. Your consideration of participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Farzaneh Khosrojerdi

EDUCATION

Sep. 2009- Present

Ph.D. Candidate

Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario.

Thesis Title: Muslim Female Students and Their Experiences of Higher Education in Canada.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. G. Rezai-Rashti

Sep. 2007-Jan. 2008

Non-Degree Part-Time Program, Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, Canada.

I took the course “Equity and Social Justice in Education”, 629A, and scored 88.

Sep. 1996-Jul. 1999

M.A. Degree in General Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, University of Tehran, Iran, GPA 89 (17.88/20).

Thesis Title: Evaluation of the Validity of the Tree-Drawing Test in Predicting the Levels of Anxiety, Depression, and Academic Achievement in Students (in Persian).

Abstract and Findings: I tested a sample of 85 grade five students by the Children Depression Scale (CDS), Children Anxiety Scale (Cattell’s Test), and Tree-Drawing Test. I measured the students’ academic achievement based on their scores in the courses mathematics, science, and dictation.

The finding of my Master’s thesis indicated that there is a meaningful negative correlation between depression/anxiety and academic achievement and that the Tree-Drawing test is valid to predict the levels of anxiety and depression.

Advisor: Professor Parioikh Dadsetan.

Feb. 1991-Jan. 1995

B.A. Degree in Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh-Tabatabaei University, Tehran, Iran, GPA 92 (18.46/20).

PUBLICATIONS

Khosrojerdi, Farzaneh (1999). Evaluation of the Validity of the Tree- Drawing Test in Predicting the Levels of Anxiety, Depression, and Academic Achievement in Students. A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a MA degree in General Psychology. University of Tehran. Tehran. Iran.

AWARDS AND SCHOLASTIC DISTINCTIONS

- 2009 **The University of Western Ontario Graduate Scholarship**, Admission Scholarship of the University of Western Ontario for Four years.
- 1999 **Ranked Second** in the Graduating Class of General Psychology, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
- 1996 **Ranked First** among about 10,000 applicants, in the Iranian Nationwide Graduate University Entrance Exam.
- 1995 **Ranked First** in the Graduating Class of Clinical Psychology, Allameh-Tabatabaei University, Tehran, Iran.
- 1991 **Ranked 65** among about 400,000 applicants, in the Iranian Nationwide Undergraduate University Entrance Exam.

PRESENTATIONS

- Apr. 1, 2015 **Robert Macmillan Graduate Research in Education Symposium**
Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario.

Title: Canadian Muslim female students and their experiences of higher education.
- Mar. 28, 2015 **Graduate Symposium in the Department of Education**
Concordia University.

Title: Canadian Muslim female students and their experiences of higher education.

Feb. 20, 2015

The Rosa Bruno-Jofre Symposium in Education
Queens University.

Title: Canadian Muslim female students and their experiences of higher education.

Apr. 20, 2011

The 2nd Annual Graduate Research in Education Symposium

Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario.
Title: Muslim women and the veil: Challenging historical and modern stereotypes and its implications for education.

Mar. 24, 2011

Research Day Poster Presentation

Great Hall. The University of Western Ontario.

Title: Muslim women and the veil: Challenging historical and modern stereotypes and its implications for education.

Nov. 2010

Seminar Course Presentation

Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario.

Title: Critical Analysis of “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, by C.T. Mohanty.

SPECIAL TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aug. 2009

Teaching Assistant Training Program (TATP)

The Teaching Support Centre, University of Western Ontario

Description: This intensive training program included modules on effective lectures, marking practices, leading labs and discussions, interpersonal communication, and hands-on teaching practice. As part of my course assignment, I prepared and taught a micro-teaching session.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Feb. 2015-Apr. 2015 **Research Assistant,**
Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario
- Research Project: Women and Education in Iran.
- Project Supervisor: Prof. G. Rezai-Rashti
-
- Sep. 2009-Apr. 2010 **Research Assistant,**
Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario
- Research Project: Women and Higher Education in Iran.
- Project Supervisor: Prof. G. Rezaie-Rashti
-
- Sep. 2011-Apr. 2012 **Research Assistant,**
Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario
- Research Project: Research on Multilingualism
- Project Supervisor: Prof. S. Taylor
-
- Sep. 2013-Apr. 2014 **Research Assistant,**
Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario
- Research Project: Internationalizing adolescent boys' bodies: PE and body image in secondary education.
- Project Supervisor: Prof. M. Kehler

Sep. 1996-July 1999

Research Assistant and M.A. Student,

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Tehran

Research Project: Evaluation of the Validity of the Tree-Drawing Test in Predicting the Levels of Anxiety, Depression, and Academic Achievement in Students.

Project Supervisor: Prof. P. Dadsetan

Jan. 1995-Sept. 1996

Research Assistant,

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh-Tabatabaei University

Research Project: Gender Issues: Investigation of Limitations and Problems in Men's and Women's Interpersonal Relationships.

Project Supervisor: Prof. M. Golzari

Dec. 1994

Undergraduate Student,

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh-Tabatabaei University,

Research Project:

Comparison of the Levels of Anxiety and Depression, between Children of Divorce and Children of healthy Marriages, Based on Family-Drawing Test.

I conducted the aforementioned research project in the framework of the course "seminar of clinical psychology topics" in which I scored 92 (18.5/20).

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Sep. 2010-Apr. 2011 **Teaching Assistant,**
Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario

Course Title: 5424, Teaching for Equity and Social Justice:
A Focus on Inclusive Curriculum.
- Jan. 2008- Mar. 2008 **Volunteer,**
Sir John A. MacDonald Public School, London, Ontario,
Canada.

I helped students with problems in reading, writing and/or
mathematics skills.
- 1991-1996 **Private Tutor,** Tehran, Iran.

While I studied as an undergraduate student, I gave private
lessons to high school students of grades 11 and 12 who
were preparing to take the Iranian nationwide undergraduate
university entrance exam. I taught mathematics, physics, and
English.

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Jan. 2008- Mar. 2008 **Volunteer,**
Sir John A. MacDonald Public School, London, Ontario.
- 2000-2002 **Full-Time Family Counselor,**
Iranian Ministry of Health, Tehran, Iran.
- 1999-2000 **Part-Time Family Counselor,**
Iranian Ministry of Health, Tehran, Iran.
- 1992-1996 **Part-Time IQ Examiner,**
Exceptional Children Organization, Tehran, Iran.
- 1991-1996 **Part-Time Private Tutor,**
Tehran, Iran.

PUBLIC SERVICE

- Mar. 2015- Present **Member,**
Parent Advisory Group- Integrated Rehabilitation Services
Planning Table, York Region District School Board